

Idling Hurts Young Lungs

Idling your car's engine sends engine exhaust into the air that hurts our environment and – especially -- our kids. Exhaust from idling vehicles is harmful everywhere, but it's especially problematic at schools. Twice a day in school parking lots vehicles line up to pick up kids or drop them off – creating the exact scenario that maximizes exposure to the dangerous pollutants in car exhaust.

Car exhaust contains carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, and cancer-causing toxins such as benzene. Breathing these fumes isn't healthy for anyone, but children are particularly vulnerable to its harms.

Car exhaust is more dangerous for children because:

- their lungs are still developing
- they breathe faster than adults, and
- they breathe 50% more air per pound of body weight.

Idling and exposure to traffic-related air pollutants has been directly linked to allergies, asthma and other respiratory diseases, to heart and cardiovascular diseases, and to cancer. Some studies even show exposure to these pollutants is associated with low birth weight babies. Also, chemical reactions between exhaust emissions has been associated with eye, nose and throat irritation and, in higher concentrations, asthma, bronchitis, increased susceptibility to respiratory infections, and decreased lung function.

When we were kids, we might have known one or two kids at school who suffered from asthma, but our children know many. Asthma is the most common chronic medical condition among children, the leading cause of hospitalizations among children, and the reason 36,000 kids miss school every day. Exposure to air pollution can trigger an asthma attack or aggravate other symptoms. An easy way we can help is to reduce idling our vehicles – especially at schools.

How can I help?

If you're going to be stopped longer than 10 seconds, turn it off

Idling more than ten seconds uses more gas than restarting your engine.

Be aware of idling when you're waiting to pick up or drop off

Idling in a line of cars maximizes exposure to exhaust's harmful pollutants for kids waiting to climb into cars or buses, for their supervising teachers, for fellow parents, and for younger siblings riding in the back seat.

Help improve air quality by curbing unnecessary idling

The average driver idles ten minutes every day, which wastes more than 30 gallons of gas per year, contributes to climate change, acid rain, and smog, and gets you 0 mph.