

# Forget visibility, air pollution is taking a toll on your vision

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**New Delhi:** It's not just the heart and lungs that air pollution knocks out of shape. Doctors in the city are reporting an increase in eye-related complaints arising from pollution. A recent survey conducted at AIIMS has revealed that 10-15% of people suffer from chronic irritation and dry eyes—conditions that are directly related to constant exposure to a high level of pollutants.

Dr J S Titiyal, professor and head of cornea, cataract and refractory surgery service at the institute, said the incidence of these problems and their related complications will increase if urgent action is not taken to improve air quality.

“Such patients require medications such as artificial tears, anti-allergic medicines and, in some cases, steroids. But these can cause severe side-effects, including loss of vision, on long-term use,” he said.

AIIMS recently conducted a questionnaire-based survey of 5,000 people who visited the hospital during the

## ADVERSE EFFECTS

**SHORT TERM** | Pollutants are allergic and toxic to eyes. **Short-term exposure can cause redness, grittiness and watering of eyes.** It tends to go away on medications, such as artificial tears and anti-allergic drugs

**LONG TERM** | Prolonged exposure to pollutants can damage outer layer of the eye. It can alter lipid profile and water content of tears. In many cases, doctors say they find patients suffering from chronic irritation

**AIIMS SURVEY** | Experts screened nearly 5,000 people with no eye disease. Nearly 10-15% said they had itchiness and dry eyes. Most of them were in the age-group of 20-40 years

### A survey conducted at AIIMS has revealed that 10%-15% of people suffer from chronic irritation and dry eyes

year 2013-2014 to assess the prevalence of eye problems.

It found that 10-15% of the respondents complained of symptoms such as watery eyes, redness and itchiness, etc. Doctors said 65% of the

respondents who complained of eye problems were men in the age group of 20-40 years.

Dr Titiyal said dry eyes, which was a common problem among the respondents, is generally seen in elderly patients. “Due to prolonged exposure to pollution, which affects the tear cells, even younger people are getting these problems, which is worrying. It affects their productivity and puts them at risk of



serious complications,” he said.

Dr Mahipal Sachdev, chairman and medical director of Centre for Sight, also said the number of patients seeking treatment for chronic irritation of the eyes and allergic conjunctivitis has increased.

“Earlier, we used to find such cases during the pollen season. But now they are coming throughout the year. Pollution certainly has a role to play in it. Particulate matter and toxic fumes get stuck in the outer surface of the eye and damage the tear film,” he said.

While long-term measures to decrease the level of air pollution are needed, eye experts said people should take preventive measures, such as using protective goggles, to decrease the eye's contact with air-borne toxins. “Do not rub the eyes if they are itching. Using artificial tears can help at times. However, for the long term, people should take preventive measures such as washing the eyes regularly and wearing protective goggles while visiting heavily polluted areas,” said another doctor.