

DOES IMPOSING LOCKDOWN HELP CURB AIR POLLUTION?

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The lockdown restrictions during the pandemic last year sent financial markets into free fall. But because of the lockdown, people of some of the world's most polluted cities got something they have not experienced in years, 'clean air'. According to observational data, the first national COVID-19 lockdown from March 24 to April 24 last year drastically reduced emissions as vehicular movement and construction activities were halted. Data from NASA's Global Modelling and Data Assimilation team clearly shows how concentrations of some pollutants fell after the lockdowns started.



Clear blue skies and an absence of visible smog seen during the first Covid-19 lockdown in India gave people much relief. But a new study claims that air pollutants did not decrease as thought. Instead, ozone levels increased, which could lead to potential health issues. The study by some researchers at York University in Canada claimed that as the air looked much cleaner, it allowed more sunshine to get through, creating conditions for ozone to increase up to 30 per cent.

Many scientists have different opinions on this issue. That's why a proper ultimate conclusion cannot be provided. Imposing lockdown is a way to curb carbon emission, but it can also lead to some problems like an increase in ozone in the lower atmosphere. But improvements in outdoor air quality is also a fact as everybody is mostly inside their houses.

Our strategy for examining the causal effect of lockdowns on air quality relies on a comparison of levels of air pollutant species, including particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), carbon monoxide (CO), and ozone (O₃) within a city around the lockdown dates. Ground stations in northern India also show a downward trend in overall PM2.5. Even in a city that did not have a formal lockdown policy, air quality levels may be affected by disease preventive measures such as the extension of the Spring Festival holiday, the stay-at-home order, and the social distancing policy.

The studies show that the environmental impacts of lockdown differed as per the development level, industrial structure, and population of a country. It allowed us to make a cross-country comparison and informed governments that taking measures suitable to local conditions should be the basic principle when charting paths to counter air pollution during the post-pandemic period.

DID YOU KNOW

Inhaling air pollution takes away at least 1-2 years of a typical human life

