

Dust From California's Salton Sea Linked to Poorer Lung Function in Children

Low-income Latino neighborhoods closest to the receding Salton Sea face the greatest respiratory health risks.

October 27, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

Windblown dust from Southern California's Salton Sea is linked to poorer [lung](#) function among [children](#), according to a study published in the [American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine](#).

Stretching about 35 miles through the state's Imperial County desert region, the Salton Sea is [California's](#) largest inland lake. For decades, the lake has been receding, leaving exposed areas of dried lakebed that release dust [into the air](#) when the wind blows.

From 2019 to 2022, researchers at the University of California at Irvine's Joe C. Wen School of Population & Public Health, used spirometry to measure lung function in nearly 500 children around 10 years old, according to a [university news release](#).

The study found a clear association between higher dust exposure and lower lung function, especially among low-income predominantly Latino neighborhoods closer to the lake.

"The drying of the Salton Sea is not only an environmental crisis but also a public health crisis," said corresponding study author Jill Johnston, MS, PhD, an associate professor of environmental and occupational health at Wen Public Health, in the release. "Our study provides concrete evidence that children in surrounding communities are facing measurable harm to their lungs as a result of increased dust exposure."

Several studies have linked environmental risks to [climate change](#) and ecosystem decline. This study is among the first to directly link dust events from a drying saline lake to measurable

declines in children's [respiratory health](#). It also adds to growing evidence that the high particulate matter levels around the shrinking Salton Sea contribute to elevated rates of [asthma](#), wheezing and other respiratory conditions.

Researchers encourage continued monitoring and intervention to reduce air pollution in the region.

"Protecting the health of children in the Salton Sea communities requires immediate attention through targeted public health strategies," Johnston said.

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