

Freedom to breathe

Calling on the UNCRC for a child's right to clean air

Guidance for educators / parents and answers to student activities

Summary: The activities in this document will help prepare students to share their views and experiences with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) about clean air and why it is important to them.

The UNCRC want to hear from children around the world:

- Since June 2021, over 29,000 children worldwide have been part of the Freedom to breathe campaign and called on the UNCRC to acknowledge their right to clean air.
- The UNCRC says that children should have access to hospitals, clean water, healthy food, a good and clean environment and education. But they do not clearly say clean air is a right!
- The UNCRC have recently asked children and young people to share their views and experiences on their rights, the environment and climate change. Any child or young person can do this by completing an online questionnaire, which is part of a UNCRC process called General Comment 26 "Children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change".
- The deadline to complete the online questionnaire is 30 June 2022.
- This is a great opportunity for children and young people to let the UNCRC know why they called for a child's right to clean air and why it is important to them.

How to use the activities:

- **All students' activities are on p.4-7 of this document. Answers are on p.2-3.**
- **Activities 1-5** have been designed to recap on the learning from the Freedom to breathe education sessions.
- Differentiation is by outcome and depending on students' knowledge and understanding, they might wish to do all, some or none of these activities (1-5).
- **Activities 6-7** will help prepare students to share their views and experiences about clean air and why it is important to them. This will help them answer the relevant parts of UNCRC's online questionnaire and help elevate a child's right to clean air. More specifically:
 - Question 5 of the online questionnaire asks children and young people to share their experiences about environmental damage and climate change. They can use their answers from activity 6 (questions 1 and 2) to help them answer this question.
 - Question 10 of the online questionnaire asks children and young people if there any messages they would like to send to adults who have a chance to demand greater climate and environmental action. They can use their answers from activity 6 (question 3) to help them answer this question.

Practical notes about the UNCRC's online questionnaire:

- The deadline is **30 June 2022**.
- Children under 15, need to have permission from a parent or legal guardian to take part.
- You can [look at the questions](#) before completing the online questionnaire.
- You can also use this [child-friendly summary](#), which explains some of the different ways children's rights, the environment and climate change are linked.

ANSWERS – ACTIVITIES 1-5

Activity 1 – Why is clean air important? ANSWERS

1. We need clean air to stay **happy** and **healthy**.
2. Cleaner air means that our **brains**, our **hearts** and our **lungs** can function (work) better!
3. Unfortunately some of the air around us is **polluted (dirty)**. This can enter our bodies and damage our physical and mental **health**.
4. Air pollution can be **indoors** and **outdoors**.

Activity 2 – Where does air pollution come from? ANSWERS

Indoor air pollution is caused by things like....	Outdoor air pollution is caused by things like....
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooking 2. Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), or chemicals in cleaning products 3. VOCs, or chemicals in personal care products 4. VOCs, or chemicals in arts and craft materials 5. Dust, mould and bacteria 6. Burning e.g. candles, incense sticks, log burning for heating or cooking etc. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vehicles 2. Factories 3. Power stations 4. Farming 5. Burning fuel 6. Other burning e.g. waste burning, crop burning etc.

Activity 3 – What is particulate matter? ANSWERS

The air carries a lot of **particles** (or small pieces), called particulate **matter**. Some are so **small / tiny** that we cannot always see them! Any amount of air pollution can damage our health but when there is **more** air pollution around us and smaller particles called **PM 2.5**, it is more dangerous for our health and development.

Activity 4 – How does air pollution affect us? ANSWERS

Key learning from the previous Freedom to breathe education sessions:

- **Lungs** – can impact breathing and cause respiratory diseases (e.g. asthma) or make symptoms worse.
- **Brain** – can impact children’s ability to learn and mental health. There is also emerging evidence on the link between air pollution and worse cognitive functions, such as memory and increased risk of dementia.
- **Heart** – air pollution can cause heart disease and other coronary (heart) related problems.

Supporting key points – why clean air is so vital for children:

- Every day, around 93% of the world’s children under the age of 15 (more than 1.8 billion children) are breathing air so polluted that it poses serious risks to their health and development.¹

- Nine out of 10 children around the world breathe air that exceeds pollution levels deemed safe by the World Health Organisation.ⁱⁱ
- By 2050, Unicef predicts that air pollution will become the leading cause of child mortality.ⁱⁱⁱ The WHO estimates that in 2016 alone, 600,000 children died from acute lower respiratory infections caused by polluted air.^{iv}
- The World Health Organisation recognises that air pollution is the largest environmental health risk we face today.
- Children’s developing organs and immune systems make them especially vulnerable to dirty air and water.^v As children grow, they continue to be at high risk from air pollution because their immune systems, lungs and brains are still developing. They are also more physically active and therefore inhale more air pollutants in relation to their body weight.^{vi}
- Exposure to air pollution can contribute to a range of health issues in children. It can impact neurodevelopment and cognitive ability and can trigger asthma, and childhood cancer. Children who have been exposed to high levels of air pollution may be at greater risk for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease later in life.^{vii}
- High air pollution has been linked to low birth weight, premature birth and stillbirths.^{viii}

¹ <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-10-2018-more-than-90-of-the-worlds-children-breathe-toxic-air-every-day>

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¹ <https://www.unicef.org/media/60106/file>

¹ WHO 2018 <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-10-2018-more-than-90-of-the-worlds-children-breathe-toxic-air-every-day>

¹ [The cost of a polluted environment, March 2017](#)

¹ "Inheriting a sustainable world: Atlas on children's health and .. - WHO." Accessed February 22, 2021.

<https://www.who.int/ceh/publications/inheriting-a-sustainable-world/en>

¹ WHO 2018 <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-10-2018-more-than-90-of-the-worlds-children-breathe-toxic-air-every-day>

¹ [WHO \(2005\) Effects of air pollution on children’s health and development](#)

Activity 5 – What is air pollution like around the world? **ANSWERS**

All the cities in the diagram have PM2.5 levels which **are above 5µg/ m³** - the level deemed safe by the World Health Organisation (2021). The higher the levels of air pollution, the higher the risk to our physical and mental health and development. Whilst air pollution can affect everyone, it can particularly affect individuals who are more vulnerable to harm including those with heart and lung disease, children and the elderly.

Activity 6 – How can I let the UNCRC know why clean air is important to me? Activity 7 – complete the UNCRC’s online questionnaire. **ANSWERS**

The questions in activity 6 are intended to be used as guidance to help complete the UNCRC’s online questionnaire. Students should be encouraged to share their personal experiences as well as any other information they feel is relevant in their own personal context. The prompts have been designed to help guide them.

Tips for finding information about local air quality issues: You can contact your local authority who might have some data / information. In many places, there are also local, national and regional clean air and health campaign groups who have websites and social media channels where they share information. You can also find information on the [World Health Organisation’s air pollution website](#).

Freedom to breathe

Student activities: calling on the UNCRC for a child's right to clean air

What has already happened with the Freedom to breathe campaign?

- Children's rights are the promises that the world's governments have made to children. Children have a special set of rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNCRC.
- The UNCRC says that children should have access to hospitals, clean water, healthy food, a good and clean environment and education. But they do not clearly say clean air is a right!
- Since June 2021, over 29,000 children worldwide have been part of the [Freedom to breathe campaign](#) and called on the UNCRC to acknowledge their right to clean air.

What happens next?

- The UNCRC have recently asked children and young people to share their views and experiences on their rights, the environment and climate change.
- This is a great opportunity to let UNCRC know why you called for a child's right to clean air and why this is important to you.
- Any child or young person can do this by completing an [online questionnaire](#), which is part of a UNCRC process called [General Comment 26](#) "Children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change".
- You can [look at the questions](#) before completing the [online questionnaire](#) – the deadline is **30 June 2022**.
- If you are under 15, you need to have permission from a parent or legal guardian.
- Complete the activities, to help prepare you to complete the online questionnaire.

Activity 1 – Why is clean air important?

Can you guess the missing words?

1. We need clean air to stay _____ and _____.
2. Cleaner air means that our _____, our _____ and our _____ can function (work) better!
3. Unfortunately some of the air around us is _____. This can enter our bodies and damage our physical and mental _____.
4. Air pollution can be _____ and _____.

Activity 2 – Where does air pollution come from?

Complete the table with different sources of indoor and outdoor air pollution:

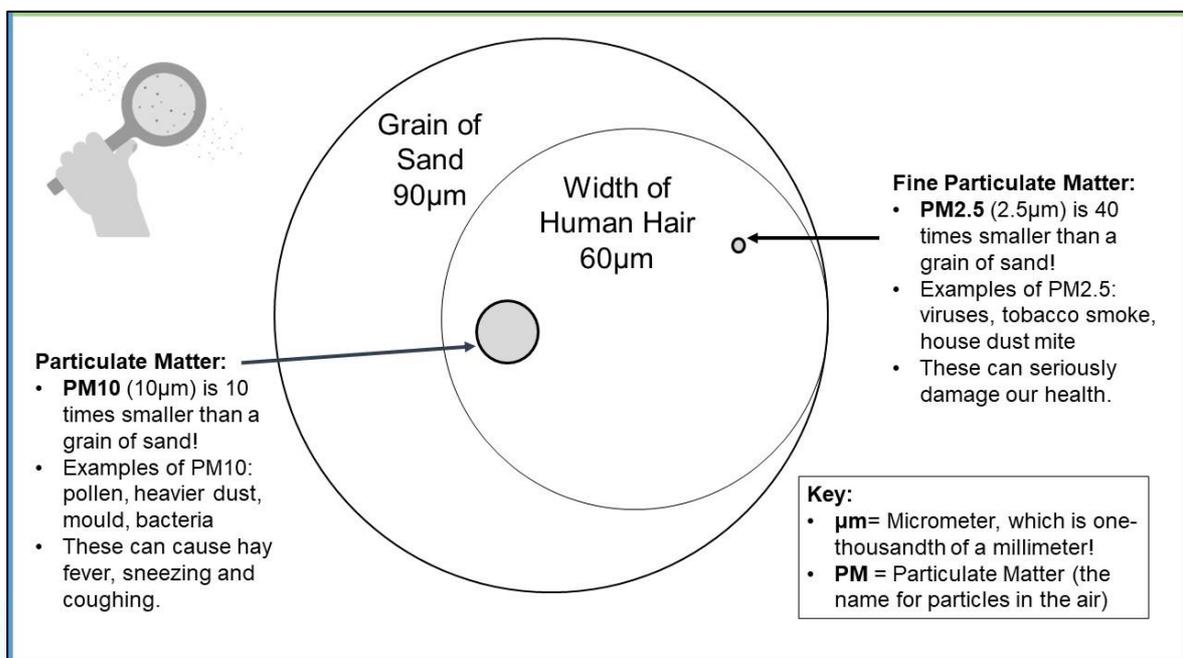
Indoor air pollution is caused by things like....	Outdoor air pollution is caused by things like....
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Activity 3 – What is particulate matter?

Look at the diagram below and complete the sentence:

The air carries a lot of _____ (or small pieces), called particulate _____.

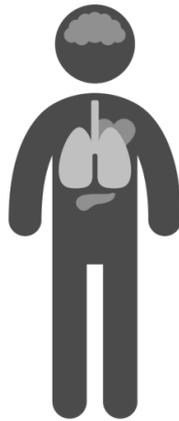
Some are so _____ that we cannot always see them! Any amount of air pollution can damage our health but when there is _____ air pollution around us and smaller particles called _____, it is more dangerous for our health and development.



Activity 4 – How does air pollution affect us?

Label the diagram to show how air pollution affects our bodies.

Try to show at least **3-5 ways** that air pollution affects our physical and mental health and development.



Activity 5 – What is air pollution like around the world?

Look at the image below and discuss with a partner:

- What do you notice about the amount of PM2.5 in each of these cities?
- Do you think this is good or bad? Why?

The amount of PM 2.5 (a type of air pollution) in different cities:



Beijing, China

42.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$



Delhi, India

98.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$



London, UK

11.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$



Los Angeles, USA

12.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$



Yaoundé, Cameroon

73 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$

- **The safe limit for PM 2.5 is $5\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.**
- This means it is dangerous for our health when the amount of PM2.5 is above **$5\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ = micrograms per one cubic meter of air

Activity 6 – How can I let the UNCRC know why clean air is important to me?

To help you prepare your answers to the online questionnaire, think about:

1. What is the air like where you live?
 - Do you know how much PM2.5 is in the air near you?
 - Does the air change at different times of day / year e.g. with traffic, smog, wildfires, crop burning, waste burning etc.? Why does this matter to you?
 - How do you feel about the air pollution where you live?

2. Has air pollution affected your life? How?
 - Do you have a health condition which is made worse by air pollution? What happens? How does this make you feel?
 - Have you had to miss school, or miss out on playing outdoors because of your health, or the air pollution where you live? How does this make you feel?
 - Do you know other people (e.g. friends, family, people in your community) that have been affected by air pollution? If so, how? How does this make you feel?

3. Is there anything you would like to say to the UNCRC about your right to clean air?
 - Is there anything you would like them to do, to help improve your situation? Or the situation of other children near you, or around the world?

Activity 7 – complete the UNCRC's online questionnaire

Share the ideas you have with the UNCRC by completing the [online questionnaire](#) before 30 June 2022!

- Some tips to help you answer the online questionnaire:
 - You can [look at the questions](#) before completing the [online questionnaire](#)
 - Question 5 asks you to share your experiences about environmental damage and climate change. You can use your answers from activity 6 (questions 1 and 2) to help you answer this question.
 - Question 10 asks you if there any messages you would like to send to adults who have a chance to demand greater climate and environmental action. You can use your answers from activity 6 (question 3) to help you answer this question.
- If you are under 15, you need to have permission from a parent or legal guardian.
- To find out more about some of the different ways children's rights, the environment and climate change are linked, it may be helpful to read this [child-friendly guide](#).