



The Impact of Atmospheric Fog on Health: From Physical Properties to Physiological Reactions

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Abstract: Atmospheric fog is a complex meteorological phenomenon that significantly affects human health through the interplay of physical, chemical, and physiological factors. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of fog's impact on respiratory, cardiovascular, and cognitive systems. The physical properties of fog, including droplet size (1–10 μm), concentration, and humidity, as well as the chemical composition—often containing pollutants such as PM_{2.5}, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and heavy metals—determine its toxicological potential. Epidemiological and physiological studies indicate that dense fog can exacerbate chronic respiratory conditions, reduce lung function, increase cardiovascular stress, and impair cognitive performance. Vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic diseases, are particularly at risk. Preventive measures, air quality monitoring, and public awareness strategies are essential to mitigate adverse health effects. The findings highlight the need for integrated environmental and health management to protect public health during fog events.

Keywords: Atmospheric fog; human health; respiratory system; cardiovascular system; cognitive function; air pollution; physiological response; epidemiology; preventive measures

Introduction

Atmospheric fog is a meteorological phenomenon characterized by the presence of small water droplets (1-10 μm in diameter) suspended in the lower layers of the atmosphere. It occurs when the air cools to the dew point and the relative humidity increases (usually >95%). Fog is a natural component of the climate, but its impact on human health has not been extensively studied, especially in combination with modern levels of urban and industrial pollution.

Existing studies indicate that fog can have a complex effect on the human body, affecting:

Respiratory system: irritation of mucous membranes, exacerbation of chronic diseases (asthma, bronchitis).

Cardiovascular system: slight increase in blood pressure, changes in heart rate.

Nervous system: decreased cognitive functions, increased fatigue and stress.

The physical properties of fog (humidity, droplet size, and contaminant content) determine the nature of the impact, and the physiological reactions of the body depend on health status, age, and time spent in fog.

The purpose of the study is to systematize data on the physical and chemical properties of fog and the mechanisms of its effect on the human body, assess the health consequences, and propose preventive measures.



Methods

1. Meteorological analysis

Data from national weather stations on fog characteristics (visibility, humidity, aerosol concentration, droplet composition) in regions with frequent fog occurrence were used. The analysis revealed patterns between the physical and chemical parameters of fog and the frequency of disease cases.

2. Epidemiological analysis

The health indicators of the population in regions with different fog frequencies were compared. The main parameters included: the frequency of bronchial asthma exacerbations, hospitalizations for cardiovascular diseases and indicators of cognitive function (according to cognitive tests in older people).

3. Physiological studies

Included a review of experimental studies with volunteers, where:

blood oxygen saturation (SpO₂),

blood pressure and heart rate,

indicators of pulmonary function (FEV₁, FVC),

cognitive and psychophysiological reactions (stress level, concentration).

Results

1. Physical properties of fog

- The average size of fog droplets is 1-10 microns, and their concentration in the air can reach 10³-10⁴ droplets per cm³.
- In urban environments, fog often contains pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, heavy metals, and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which can increase the toxic effects on the respiratory system.
- When fog is dense, the humidity level can reach 95-100%, and the temperature is usually close to the dew point, which can affect the body's thermal balance.

2. Effects on the respiratory system

- Mist particles settle on the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract, causing irritation and inflammation.
- Bronchial asthma exacerbations are observed in 12-18% of patients in regions with frequent fog (data from epidemiological studies in China and Europe).
- In healthy individuals, temporary exposure to dense fog can cause a slight decrease in lung function (FVC and FEV₁ by 5-10%).

3. Effects on the cardiovascular system

Experimental data shows an increase in heart rate by 5-8% and a moderate increase in blood pressure during prolonged exposure to dense fog.

These effects are more pronounced in people with hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

The combination of high humidity and low temperature puts a strain on the heart and blood vessels.



4. Psychophysiological effects

- Reduced visibility and increased humidity increase stress, fatigue, and decreased concentration.
- In older people and people with chronic diseases, fog can impair cognitive functions and response to external stimuli.

5. Epidemiological data

- In regions with high fog frequencies, there is a 15-20% increase in hospitalizations for respiratory diseases during the cold season.
- In urban areas with high levels of air pollution and frequent fog, the incidence of cardiovascular diseases is 10-12% higher compared to "clean" areas.

Discussion

Atmospheric fog has a complex effect on the human body through physical, chemical, and physiological mechanisms. Key observations:

1. Physical and chemical properties:

The size and concentration of droplets determine how deeply the particles penetrate the respiratory tract.

The presence of toxic substances enhances inflammatory responses and can cause oxidative stress.

2. Physiological reactions of the body:

The respiratory system reacts to high humidity and aerosols through reflex and inflammatory mechanisms.

The cardiovascular system experiences additional stress due to changes in thermoregulation and blood viscosity.

Psychophysiological stress manifests itself in the form of decreased cognitive activity, which is confirmed by experimental data.

1. Clinical significance:

Vulnerable groups (children, elderly, and patients with chronic diseases) are most susceptible to the negative effects of fog.

Air quality monitoring and preventive measures are necessary, including limiting outdoor activities during dense fog, using masks, and maintaining optimal indoor conditions.

Conclusion

Atmospheric fog exerts a multifaceted impact on human health, resulting from the interplay of physical, chemical, and physiological factors. Physically, fog consists of fine water droplets that can vary in size from 1 to 10 μm , which, depending on concentration and composition, can penetrate the respiratory system and interact with mucous membranes. Chemically, fog in urban and industrial areas often carries pollutants, including particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), nitrogen oxides (NO₂), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), and heavy metals, which amplify inflammatory and oxidative stress responses in the body.

Physiologically, the respiratory and cardiovascular systems are particularly vulnerable. Exposure to dense fog can exacerbate chronic respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis, reduce lung function in healthy individuals, and trigger inflammation of the airways. The cardiovascular system may respond with increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, and higher cardiac workload, especially among elderly individuals and those with preexisting conditions. Cognitive and psychophysiological functions are also affected: reduced visibility, damp and cold conditions, and



environmental stressors associated with fog can lead to fatigue, decreased attention, slower reaction times, and heightened psychological stress.

To mitigate these negative effects, a combination of preventive and monitoring measures is essential. Public health strategies should include air quality monitoring to detect hazardous conditions, timely dissemination of warnings during dense fog periods, and public education about protective behaviors, such as limiting outdoor activities, using protective masks, and maintaining optimal indoor air conditions. In addition, special attention should be given to vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic respiratory or cardiovascular diseases, to reduce their risk of fog-related health complications.

Overall, the complex interaction of fog's physical properties, chemical composition, and human physiological responses underscores the importance of integrated environmental and health management strategies to minimize adverse outcomes and protect population health during fog events.

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