



EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01AM (AEST) THURSDAY, MAY 6

Invisible Danger: Gas, Asthma and our Children

NEW REPORT: Gas heaters used in most New South Wales schools are exposing children to a higher risk of asthma and dangerous indoor air pollution, a new Climate Council report has found.

The report, [*Kicking the Gas Habit: How Gas is Harming our Health*](#), finds that while most states and territories have banned unflued gas heaters in schools that release pollutants directly into the classroom, the majority of New South Wales schools still use them.

“Parents would be shocked to learn that sending their child to school could be harming their health. Unflued gas heaters release nitrogen oxides into the classroom, during winter, which can trigger asthma symptoms,” said Asthma Australia CEO, Michele Goldman.

“How many more generations of New South Wales children will have to unwittingly breathe in unhealthy air whilst learning in their classrooms,” she said.

“Australia has some of the highest rates of asthma in the world, and it is the leading cause of disease burden among school-aged children,” said Ms Goldman.

“The NSW Government should be doing everything possible to improve health outcomes for our children and that means removing dangerous gas heaters from schools and replacing them with electric alternatives,” said Climate Council health expert and report author, Dr Kate Charlesworth.

PRESSER DETAILS: THURSDAY, MAY 6 2021

TIME: 10:30AM AEST

LOCATION: SYDNEY, Media Room at NSW Parliament

TALENT: Dr Kate Charlesworth, Climate Council health expert and report author and Michele Goldman, Asthma Australia CEO

VISION: Grabs and overlay of Dr Josh Byrne, who took his Perth house off gas and is saving money, as well as general gas power station and infrastructure overlay.

“This new report also found that gas is not only a fossil fuel that is driving climate change, but cooking with gas is estimated to be responsible for up to 12 percent of the childhood asthma burden* in Australia,” said Dr Charlesworth.

“A child living with gas cooking in the home faces a comparable risk of asthma to a child living with household cigarette smoke,” she said.

Australia has some of the highest rates of asthma in the world, and it is already the leading cause of disease burden among school-aged children.

Report key findings:

- Far from the “clean and natural” image that the gas industry markets, gas cooktops are known to produce contaminants that increase the risk of childhood asthma: in particular, nitrogen dioxide and certain forms of particulate matter, like PM2.5.
- Children and poorer households are at highest risk from, and most likely to be harmed by gas production and use.
- Gas is a polluting fossil fuel. Governments can prevent health issues, and reduce harm, by helping households and the country move away from gas.
- Clean energy alternatives like solar and wind are the key to a prosperous, healthy future for all Australians.

“The NSW Government needs to urgently develop a plan to replace all unflued gas heaters in its schools to ensure that all children are safe. Its ‘Cooler Classrooms’ program only targets certain schools, and is not moving fast enough,” said Dr Charlesworth.

“The government should also take simple, practical steps to reduce exposure to gas in homes by ending mandatory gas connections for new residential developments – just as the ACT has done – and make it more affordable for vulnerable households to replace their gas appliances,” she said.

“Gas is both directly hazardous to our health, and also as a fossil fuel drives climate change, which worsens health risks related to extreme weather such as heatwaves, bushfires and intense storms,” she said.

“Just as doctors spoke up on the dangers of asbestos and tobacco in the past, we have a responsibility now to sound the alarm on the dangers of gas,” said Dr Charlesworth.

****Burden of disease explained [here](#)***

For interviews please contact Brianna Hudson on 0455 238 875 or Lisa Upton on 0438 972 260.

A complete list of external gas experts; farmers; parents; and businesses and local governments is available [here](#).

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