The health hazards of Delhi’s increasing air pollution levels

New Delhi, 31 October, 2016: Delhi’s increasing air pollution levels continue to concern the medical fraternity. Air pollution is linked to increased rates of morbidity and mortality, in particular from cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses. Environmental pollution, especially with high particulate matter PM 2.5 exposure, has also been proved to be linked with an increased prevalence of diabetes. It is thus important to raise awareness about the health hazards of high air pollution levels and necessary steps each one of us must take to stay healthy.

“The extremely high level of air pollution in Delhi is a matter of concern for the medical fraternity as a whole and it is necessary that each one of us do our bit to help reduce this. It is important that people consider environmentally friendly options like carpooling and should be encouraged to use public transport. Proper disposal of waste material is also essential”, said Padma Shri Awardee Dr. KK Aggarwal – National President Elect IMA & President Heart Care Foundation of India.

“People at high risk include those with existing lifestyle diseases, children and the elderly. This group must not stay in densely polluted areas for a long period of time, wear masks and should avoid engaging in strenuous outdoor activities”, Dr. KK Aggarwal added.

Research indicates that a decrease in the concentration of the fine particulate pollution (PM2.5) by 10 micrograms per cubic meter is associated with an increased life expectancy of 0.77 year and 15 percent of the overall increase in life expectancy.

Air pollution is also associated with adverse effects on lung development and decreased lung function in children. In children with and without asthma, improvements in air quality (decreased levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter) is associated with improvements in both forced expiratory volume in 1 second and forced vital capacity between age 11 and 15. There is a known correlation between levels of air pollution and lung disease, but the association between air pollution and asthma is less clear.

Here are a few tips to reduce your risk of illnesses triggered by high pollution levels-

- Limit exposure to pollution
Eat a healthy diet with lots of fruits, vegetables and a diet rich in vitamin C, which can reduce the effects of air pollution

Drink plenty of water

Do not smoke, if you smoke, stop doing it

Avoid passive smoking

Avoid industrialized areas where pollution levels are high and air quality is at dangerous levels

Close the car's windows during peak traffic hours

Make sure that children wear anti-pollution masks while going outdoors

Practice good hygiene such as washing hands frequently, especially after you’ve been in a public place

In case you suffer from asthma, ensure that you always keep an inhaler handy

Do not exercise in outdoor spaces when the pollution levels are high