

Mumbai: Air quality improves in 2024, marks first 'Good' months in years

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AQI drops to five-year low, but respiratory deaths still cast a shadow on Mumbai's improving skies. According to Praja Foundation, the average AQI in 2024 stood at 87, placing it in the 'moderate' zone and showing an improvement over 2019's average AQI of 92. The city also experienced eight consecutive months of 'satisfactory' or 'good' air quality



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Pic/Shadab Khan

After years of worsening air, Mumbai is finally breathing a little easier. The city's air quality is returning to pre-pandemic levels, according to the latest Praja Foundation report for 2023-24. It highlights that while air quality had sharply deteriorated post-pandemic, 2024 marks a turnaround, with multiple months registering 'Good' air quality for the first time in years.

Traditionally, the winter months see [AQI](#) (Air Quality Index) levels spike, but in 2024, they have remained relatively moderate, hinting at broader improvements across the city. From 2019 to 2024, Mumbai's battle with pollution has been a mix of slow progress and continuing health risks.

According to Praja Foundation, the average AQI in 2024 stood at 87, placing it in the 'moderate' zone and showing an improvement over 2019's average AQI of 92. The city also experienced eight consecutive months of 'satisfactory' or 'good' air quality. Even the winter months, which typically see the worst pollution, recorded lower levels than in previous years.

While data was incomplete for [western suburbs](#), the eastern suburbs recorded the best air, with the island city staying in the moderate range. Wind and rainfall from April to August helped improve air quality, with August recording the lowest average AQI at 40. December was the worst, peaking at 143.

The report recommends installing AQI monitoring stations, ward-wise, for more accurate data. It also urges better coordination between CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) and SAFAR (System of Air Quality, Weather Forecasting, and Research) to create a unified air quality reporting system.

AQI vs respiratory deaths

Between 2019 and 2022, Mumbai's AQI steadily worsened, from 92 in 2019 to 125 in 2022. This period also saw persistently high deaths from respiratory illnesses, including:

Over 4000 annual deaths from lower respiratory diseases.

Continued threats from respiratory tuberculosis and neoplasms.

While 2023 saw a slight dip in [AQI](#) to 108, no month registered "Good" air quality (AQI <50), underlining how severe the pollution problem had become.

Key findings & recommendations

Sustained policies work: 2024 proves that long-term environmental efforts can pay off.

Pollution is still deadly: Even when AQI improves, health impacts linger.

Data is vital: Real-time AQI and mortality tracking must guide targeted public health action.

Infrastructure needs syncing: Health services should align with pollution patterns, especially in high-risk winter months.

But what about deaths?

While respiratory death data for 2023 and 2024 is incomplete, trends from prior years suggest a consistent correlation between high AQI and mortality:

13,266 respiratory-related deaths were reported in 2019, dropping to 11,209 in 2022, but still an alarming figure.

Deaths from chronic pulmonary illnesses and lower respiratory diseases remained the leading causes.

If the 2024 AQI improvements hold, experts expect a future decline in these mortality figures, pending confirmation from public health data.

2024: A turning point

The year 2024 marked a sharp improvement:

January and February, usually the most polluted months, showed improved AQIs of 114 and 119, respectively.

Summer months (June to August) recorded cleanest air in five years, with AQIs in the 40s.

“This suggests that pollution control policies, public awareness, and even behavioural shifts from the pandemic era, like reduced vehicular movement and slowed industrial activity, have had a lasting impact,” the report notes.

However, Praja Foundation pointed out that the positioning of air monitoring stations affects accuracy. “Stations should be placed near landfills, STPs, and industrial areas to accurately reflect poor air zones, and closer to gardens or coastlines to reflect cleaner zones,” said Shreyas Chorgi, manager – research and analysis.

Praja had filed an RTI request to obtain official data on AQI station locations and is awaiting a response.





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