



RESEARCH SUMMARY

U.S. CITIES HAD CLEAN AIR BEFORE COVID-19

BEFORE COVID-19

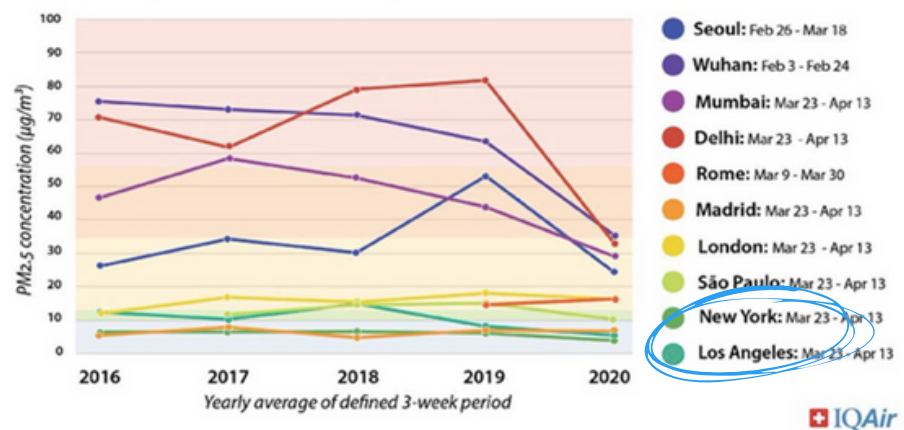
Reducing Emissions Will Barely Move the Needle

Declines in vehicle travel and economic activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to an unprecedented worldwide experiment in air quality. With passenger vehicle travel down 30-40% in March and April, it would make sense that the difference in air quality should be significant — but the latest data from the Environmental Protection Agency tell a different story.

- U.S. cities have some of the cleanest, safest air in the world. Natural and imported pollution along with local weather often have a larger effect on air quality in the U.S. than human emissions.
- Headlines suggesting fewer vehicle emissions during March and April 2020 were the primary cause of record low pollution levels are not supported by the data. Most of the changes fell well within normal year-to-year variations, and in some cities, pollution actually went up.
- The lack of significant improvement in air quality is evidence that more regulations and subsidizing electric vehicles will not meaningfully improve air quality and are not worth the cost.

This chart shows particulate matter pollution in major cities around the globe. PM2.5 levels in Los Angeles are nearly 10 times lower than levels in Seoul or Delhi. News articles consistently fail to mention this when they report percentage changes in pollution levels.

Three-Week Average PM2.5 Concentrations in Major World Cities, 2016 to 2020



IQAir

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