
THE BENEFITS AND DETRIMENTS OF COVID-19 ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has caused a worldwide disruption in the past 2 years. It has affected the lifestyle of every human being. The impact of COVID19 on the environment has been a mixture of positive and negative. The lockdown situation during the Covid19 pandemic may have a mixed impact on the environment which maybe a short term or long-term effect. For past few decades, the protection of the environment has been a part of a major discussion. The measures taken for the safety of human being's health has a negative impact on the environment. The strategies should be implemented in such a way that it saves lives as well as it protects our mother earth. In this article, I aim to analyze the effects due to covid on the environment. The negative effect like increasing medical waste, haphazard disposal of masks, syringes, gloves, etc. and increase in municipal waste and the reduction in the process of recycling the waste and the positive impact like reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG), reduction in noise pollution and reduction in air pollution, improvement in water quality and uses and the protection of wildlife. I also aim to highlight the fact that the immediate course of action taken by the government would not be enough on a long-term basis.

Introduction-

While Covid-19 has been a bane for the human race, it has also in some ways proved to be a boon for the environment. The Huanan seafood market in Wuhan City of China, and declared as an international public health emergency in a couple of weeks by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020a). The symptoms of COVID-19 infection include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, breathing difficulty, myalgia or fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea (Huang et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Severe cases can lead to cardiac injury, respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, and even death (Holshue, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Older people along with other underlying medical conditions are at a high risk of mortality (Chen, 2020).

The novel virus has put a standstill to much of the human activities, thereby freeing the environment from major pollutants. The need and protection of the environment is more important in this era than it was ever.

India has various laws and committees to keep an eye on the issues relating to the environment. Under the Indian Constitution, Part IV A (Article 51A- fundamental duties) mentions duties and responsibilities of every citizen of the country towards the protection of the environment that involves forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife. Part IVA (Article 48A- directive principles of state policies) work hard towards the protection and improvement of the environment and safeguard the forest and wildlife. Excluding these articles, different laws were enacted for the protection of the environment.

The laws other than mentioned in Part IVA for the protection of the environment are as follows-

1. ¹The National Green Tribunal Act 2010

The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 (No. 19 of 2010) (NGT Act) has been enacted with the objectives to provide for establishment of a National Green Tribunal (NGT) for the effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environment protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement of any

¹ Vinay Vanish, Managing Partner, Hitender Mehta, Partner, *India: Environment Laws in India*, <https://www.mondaq.com/india/waste-management/624836/environment-laws-in-india>

legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

2. ²The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981

The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 (the "Air Act") is an act to provide for the prevention, control and abatement of air pollution and for the establishment of Boards at the Central and State levels with a view to carrying out the aforesaid purposes.

3. ³The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974

The Water Prevention and Control of Pollution Act, 1974 (the "Water Act") has been enacted to provide for the prevention and control of water pollution and to maintain or restore wholesomeness of water in the country.

4. ⁴The Environment Protection Act 1986

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 (the "Environment Act") provides for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Environment Protection Act establishes the framework for studying, planning and implementing long-term requirements of environmental safety and laying down a system of speedy and adequate response to situations threatening the environment.

Though these laws have been stated and to some extent also enacted, the past few years considering some human reforms, industrialization and other urban development have been very hard on the environment and the climate.

Observations-

The global disruption caused by COVID19 has brought about several changes in the environment, climate and wildlife. The pandemic and the adherence to its restrictions has helped to fight and control the spread of the virus, while also preventing human movement,

² [environment-laws-in-india](#)

³ [environment-laws-in-india](#)

⁴ [environment-laws-in-india](#)

even if it was just for a while. The environment, although was seen celebrating in some parts of the world with trees and plants in full bloom. Although positive, these effects are only temporary and are likely to return to their adverse state once human activities resume entirely.

The positive effects on environment during COVID19-

The temporary positive effect noticed is the visible improvement in pollution levels. The pollution levels improved significantly, although they would seemingly rise once the world gets back to normalcy. The Coronavirus crisis highlights the urgent need to look after environmental health along with human health too.

The pandemic has shown us the positive aspects of the environment such as the improvement of air quality, reduction in water and noise pollution.

1. Reduction of air pollution and GHGs emission- Due to the lockdown, the industries, transportations and companies had been closed down and that resulted in a sudden drop of greenhouse gases emissions. There was significant improvement in air pollution levels, where most countries were able to establish a minimal Air Quality Index (AQI). A finding in a report by ⁵State of global Air/2019 concluded that air pollution was the fifth leading risk factor for mortality worldwide in 2017, with ambient air pollution contributing to around 5 million deaths globally.
2. Reduction in water pollution- The water bodies were seen to be cleared out with the decrease in human activities. For example, the ⁶Suspended Particulate Matter (SPM) concentration during the lockdown period at Vembanad lake decreased by 15.9% on average compared with the pre-lockdown period.
3. Reduction in CO2 levels- In the year 2019, ⁷CO2 levels worldwide reached an all-time high i.e. 411 ppm. With the world coming to a standstill, the CO2 emissions fell by nearly 6.4% in 2020 after rising for decades.
4. Reduction in noise pollution- Noise pollution is the elevated levels generated from different human activities. Anthropogenic noise pollution has adverse impacts on the wildlife through changing balance in predator and prey detection and avoidance.

⁵ <https://www.stateofglobalair.org>

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720325298>

⁷ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00090-3>

However, the quarantine and lockdown measures mandate that everyone stay home and reduce economic activities which results in a decrease of noise pollution. And due to the travel restrictions, the rate of noise pollution has also decreased.

The negative effects on the environment during COVID19-

Although there were a multitude of visible positive effects of COVID19 on the environment, there is another side of it too. The negative consequences of COVID19 like increase of medical waste, haphazard use and disposal of masks, gloves, bottles, etc. and the untreated waste endanger the environment on a large scale.

During the pandemic, it has come to the notice that, the medical waste generation has increased globally, which results as a threat to the public health and the environment at large.

It has become a challenge for the local waste management authority to tackle these situations. The use of masks, gloves, needles, syringes, and other safety equipment and the disposal of these items in open places cause harmful and haphazard effects. This disposal of waste directly affects the air, water, and soil pollution. Due to the pandemic and lockdown policy, this led to the increase of online shopping and home delivery services which lead to household waste.

Many countries like the USA, UK, Italy and other European countries prohibited infected residents from sorting the waste. This overall results in disruption of routine municipal waste management, recycling activities and increased environment pollutants worldwide.

Wildlife- The pandemic has affected the wildlife at large. Some species rely heavily on humans for feeding them like monkeys, gulls, dogs, cats, etc., have been struggling for food because of the pandemic situation. The plastic pollution from improper disposal of single use COVID19 protection gear has also increased global plastic pollution and caused death of wildlife, as the animals ingest plastic items.

Conclusion-

The coronavirus disease (COVID19) has been a turnover in the history of mankind, where the entire human race was somehow affected. There have been some many direct and indirect effects of coronavirus disease on the environment, which can be ignored for a short term, but it will definitely destroy the environment for the upcoming generations. Some aspects of the

environment improved drastically, but some deteriorated too. Overall, the need of the hour is to save the environment, so that alongside the environment the human race thrives too.