



No epidemiological studies have yet directly measured the health effects of living near data centers, despite a laundry list of exposures to known health hazards and a federal push to accelerate data center development at breakneck speed.

## KEY FACTS

- 1. Data centers can create several overlapping health hazards in the same community.** Their health footprint includes pollution from **onsite diesel generators** and **fossil fuel power plants, construction dust and truck traffic, continuous industrial noise, heavy water withdrawals,** and potentially contaminated wastewater from cooling systems. A **2026 peer-reviewed assessment** warned that these combined impacts can affect respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological, mental, and community health.
- 2. Diesel backup generators release toxic, cancer-causing pollution.** A 2024 **legislative study** found that data centers rely heavily on diesel backup generators for power, finding that nearly all data centers in the state maintain diesel generators onsite. The **EPA** links diesel exhaust to **asthma, heart and lung disease, hospitalization, and premature death**, while the World Health Organization classifies it as **carcinogenic** to humans.
- 3. Data centers can threaten drinking water, private wells, and groundwater.** Large cooling demands and unregulated operations are **straining local water supplies**, while **contaminated cooling wastewater may threaten aquifers and burden local water treatment systems.** A **2025 Executive Order** has also directed the EPA to identify Superfund and Brownfield Sites for data center development, even though **EPA guidance** warns that construction on contaminated land could **disturb capped soil or groundwater and allow pollutants to migrate.**
- 4. “The hum” and low frequency vibrations are a valid health concern, not simply an annoyance.** Cooling equipment, fans, transformers, and generators can produce a persistent industrial hum **24 hours a day.** While the **World Health**
- Organization** recommends keeping nighttime bedroom noise below 30 decibels, a **2024 JLARC study** documented data center sound complaint levels of approximately 40 to 59 decibels. **Peer-reviewed research** and the World Health Organization guidance link long-term environmental noise exposure to disrupted sleep, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment, stress, and mental health effects. Livestock farmers report that over the last two years, no live births of calves near data centers have occurred. What is the impact on fertility to humans? **Children are particularly vulnerable** to impaired concentration, learning, and reading comprehension.
- 5. Data center development is moving faster than public health research and protections.** A **2026 peer-reviewed study** found that **no epidemiological studies** had yet directly measured health outcomes attributable specifically to data center operations. Researchers called for **baseline monitoring, high resolution exposure assessments, and direct studies of neighboring communities.** Washington State offers one **policy model:** when projected toxic-air pollution exceeds state screening levels, data center developers **must assess potential cancer and other health risks** before receiving an air permit to build or expand.

## QUESTIONS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

- Will an independent health impact assessment be completed before this project is approved?
- Will the assessment examine cumulative exposure to air pollution, noise, water withdrawals, wastewater, construction dust, traffic, and contaminated land?
- What baseline testing will be completed for local air quality, drinking water, private wells, groundwater, and noise before construction begins?
- Will all permits, monitoring results, health assessments, violations, and emergency response plans be made publicly available?
- Who will pay for independent testing, long-term health monitoring, and remediation if residents' health or local water supplies are harmed?

### Cautionary Example

In Morgan County, Georgia, residents living near Meta's data center construction reported that their private well water turned brown, lost pressure, and filled with sediment. Jars of the discolored water were presented during a **May 2026 congressional hearing**, where EPA officials agreed to investigate whether the construction contributed to the problem. The connection has not yet been conclusively established, but the case exposes the danger of approving massive projects without baseline well testing or clear protections for the households nearby these facilities.



## Community Win

In June 2026, 41 mayors across six continents endorsed the **Global Urban Data Centres Pact**, the first global mayor-led vision for responsible urban data center development. The pact calls for data centers to be fossil-fuel free, conserve and reuse water, minimize noise, heat, and air pollution, disclose environmental impacts, engage affected communities, and pay for the infrastructure they require. While the pact is not legally binding, it gives local governments a shared framework for protecting public health, natural resources, and residents from unchecked development.

### Recommended Call To Action

Do not allow communities to become public-health test sites. Require independent cumulative health impact assessments, baseline air, water, and noise testing, enforceable exposure limits, and developer-funded long term health monitoring before any data center is approved or expanded.