Being stuck in traffic is even worse than you thought. A new study, reported in yesterday's NY Times, "pollution levels inside cars at red lights or in traffic jams are up to 40 percent higher than when traffic is moving."

But things could be worse: you could be a kid on an older school bus. Here's a summary of some of the earlier research:

"Air inside the big, yellow buses used to shuttle children to and from school can contain up to 8.5 times more diesel exhaust than people typically breathe in smoggy California–enough to expose children to dangerous levels of cancer-causing soot, according to new research. . . .

"Closing the windows doesn't help–soot concentrations more than double when that happens–and air in the back of the bus is slightly worse than in front, the study found. Leaks in the floorboards and swirling exhaust backwash apparently allow exhaust to seep into bus interiors. heir cars than outside.

"A second study in Sacramento found that levels of tiny soot particles inside a diesel-powered school bus were twice as high as levels outside."

Newer buses with very low-sulfur good can reduce the risk substantially — something that actually results in a decrease from respiratory illness, according to a recent study. EPA has imposed strict standards for new buses and has an active program to help schools replace some of their oldest buses. Reducing idling helps too.

Which reminds me, there are lots of good reasons to turn off your car whenever you're stopped more than 10 seconds –it saves gas, cuts pollution, and reduces carbon. And modern car engines don't need to need to be warmed up before driving on a cold day and aren't harmed by starting and restarting. If people stuck in traffic jams could turn off their engines, they'd be better off, and so would the kids on the school bus behind them.