

Air quality back at unhealthy levels, docs issue warning

Migraine sufferers at risk of attacks; hospitals step up measures to ensure cleaner air indoors

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Haze returned to Singapore yesterday, pushing air quality to unhealthy levels in some parts of the country and doctors warned that pa-

tients with pre-existing medical conditions could experience increased discomfort.

Those who suffer from migraines are at greater risk of attacks on poor air-quality days, doctors said.

As of 11pm yesterday, the 24-hour Pollutant Standards Index (PSI)

ranged from 96 to 109, within the moderate to unhealthy range. The National Environment Agency (NEA) has advised the public to cut down on outdoor activities when PSI readings exceed 100.

A PSI reading of zero to 50 indicates good air quality, while a reading of 51 to 100 is in the moderate range. A reading of 101 to 200 is considered unhealthy.

Dr Jonathan Ong, a neurology consultant at the National Univer-

sity Hospital (NUH), said: "Some of my patients complain that during the haze season, their migraine seems to worsen both in terms of intensity and frequency. As migraineurs are often sensitive to odours, the burning smell of the haze may also trigger attacks."

At 11pm, the one-hour PM2.5 concentration was 43 to 56 micrograms per cubic m.

The one-hour PM2.5 measures the average hourly concentration

of PM2.5 particles – the dominant pollutant during haze episodes – and is meant to help people decide what activities to engage in.

There are four bands on the PM2.5 concentration scale: 0 to 55 for normal, 56 to 150 for elevated, 151 to 250 for high, and very high for any higher readings.

Dr Liew Mei Fong, a respiratory and critical care medicine consultant at Alexandra Hospital, noted that the compounding effects of the haze extended to a host of other respiratory conditions.

"Ailments brought on by haze may be asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis and upper respiratory tract infection. Patients with pre-existing allergic rhinitis, asthma and chronic obstructive lung disease may experience cough, chest discomfort and breathlessness," she said.

She advised patients with asthma to ensure they use their regular corticosteroids inhalers, and encour-

aged them to consider a top-up if they feel unwell.

The National University Hospital System (NUHS) – made up of National University Hospital, Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, Alexandra Hospital, Jurong Community Hospital and National University Polyclinics and others – said special measures have been employed.

These include shutting windows in patient areas that are naturally ventilated and deploying portable air cooling and purifying units. Air-conditioning systems have also been fitted with filters to minimise pollutants and smell in the air.

NEA said showers are expected in south Sumatra at the end of the month, and this could provide some respite.

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