

## Windows closed, air purifiers on to keep patients safe from haze

Container driver Ow Soo Tian, 69, with nurse manager Tai Sook Ping, 46, in a subsidised ward at Alexandra Hospital yesterday. Public hospitals have been closing the windows in such wards – which are usually naturally ventilated – as the haze lingers, and placing portable air-conditioning units and air purifiers in the wards to protect patients.

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KUA CHEE SIONG

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# Singapore hospitals take steps to protect patients from haze

## Elderly patients closely monitored; portable air-con units installed in subsidised wards

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Public sector hospitals have been closing the windows in subsidised wards and ventilating them with portable air-conditioning units to protect patients from the haze.

They are also actively monitoring their patients, many of whom are elderly and hence more susceptible to the effects of haze, so that remedial action can be taken immediately.

While slightly hazy conditions can still be expected today, the National Environment Agency (NEA) forecasts that air quality will improve.

The haze can cause breathing difficulties, including wheezing, and bring on attacks of asthma or bronchitis. It can also trigger migraine, eczema, tearing eyes and runny nose.

Good Pharma Dermatology said sales of its eczema cream have risen by more than 30 per cent since the haze worsened here.

The Ministry of Health said it has reminded hospitals, polyclinics and nursing homes "to put in place haze-preparedness measures and prepare for any increase in the number of cases of haze-related conditions". These include using air purifiers, fans and portable air coolers to reduce temperatures in the wards.

All subsidised wards in public hospitals have to be "naturally ventilated" according to policy.

Although some hospitals now do provide air cooling in subsidised wards, having discovered that cooler air reduces medical problems such as bedsores which can result in longer stays for patients, they nevertheless have to keep windows open to comply with the need for natural ventilation.

It is only with the arrival of the haze that they are closing windows in the subsidised wards.

Senior security officer Haron Jasmin, 65, who was in Alexandra Hospital for a flare-up of his gout and lung infection, said: "I find the air in the ward, even though the windows are closed, smelling fresh and nice; not dusty."

A spokesman for Khoo Teck Puat and Yishun Community hospitals said they have ensured that the hospitals have sufficient stockpiles of masks and relevant medication.

The National University Health System, which runs the National University, Ng Teng Fong, Alexandra and Jurong Community hospitals, said it has added filters to the air-conditioning system "to minimise pollutants and smell in the air".

Its spokesman said that, at its polyclinics, the elderly, pregnant women, children and those with existing chronic respiratory and heart



Senior security officer Haron Jasmin is safe at Alexandra Hospital with a portable air-conditioning unit and an air purifier (blue) providing ventilation. Beside him is his wife Rabiah Tik, 65, who was visiting yesterday. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

diseases will be given priority for consultations and treatment. Staff who are susceptible to the ill-effects of the haze have been redeployed to work indoors, she said.

Some respite from the haze is expected today, with thundery show-

ers in the late morning and early afternoon.

NEA said last evening that for the next 24 hours, the one-hour PM2.5 readings are forecast to be in the normal band, but may occasionally enter the elevated range.

The 24-hour Pollutant Standards Index is expected to be in the low end of the unhealthy range, and gradually improve to enter the high end of the moderate range.

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