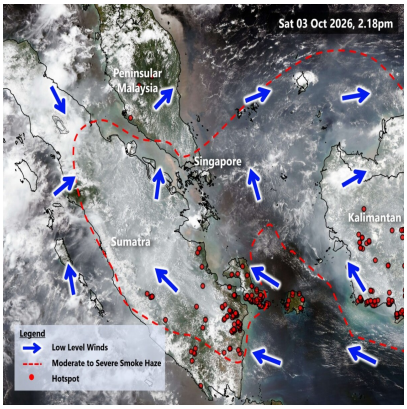

Haze and school: what MOE does at each PSI level, and how to clean the air at home

Description

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Schools and kindergartens run by the Ministry of Education (MOE) step up their haze measures in stages as the 24-hour PSI forecast climbs, with smoke from fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan drifting towards Singapore this weekend. Below a PSI of 100, classes and activities carry on as normal. From 101, outdoor exertion is cut back, and above 300, lessons are scaled down and schools may close.

PSI bands, mask advice and precautions for vulnerable groups are in our 30 September haze guide, and Sundayâ??s readings are in our PSI update.

How to plan your outdoo activities during haze

For immediate outdoor activities

Use the 1-hour $PM_{2.5}$ readings and personal guide^

The 1-hour $PM_{2.5}$ concentration indicates the current air quality. When pl activities within the next few hours, public are advised to refer to the lat $PM_{2.5}$ readings before proceeding.

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BAND 1 (NORMAL) (0 - 55 µg/m³)	BAND 2 (ELEVATED) (56 - 150 µg/m³)	BAND 3 (HIGH) (151 - 250 µg/m³)	BAND 4 (VE (≥251 µg/m³)
CONTINUE with normal activities	**REDUCE** strenuous outdoor activity for the next hour **Vulnerable persons*** **– AVOID** strenuous outdoor activity for the next hour	**AVOID** strenuous outdoor activity for the next hour **Vulnerable persons*** **– AVOID** all outdoor activity for the next hour	**MINIMISE** all outdoor activ for the next hou **Vulnerable per – AVOID** all outd for the next hou

^ This guide is not intended to be prescriptive. For the general population, symptoms that may arise from short-term exposu throat or eye irritations are expected to resolve after withdrawing from the exposure.

* Vulnerable persons include the elderly, pregnant women, children, and persons with chronic lung disease or heart disease.

For next day activities

Use the 24-hour PSI forecast and health advisory

The 24-hour PSI forecast+ and the corresponding health advisory should when planning for next day outdoor activities.

24-HOUR PSI FORECAST	GOOD (0 - 50)	MODERATE (51 - 100)	UNHEALTHY (101 - 200)	VERY UNHEALTHY (201 - 300)	HA (>3
Healthy Persons	**Normal activities**	**Normal activities**	**REDUCE** prolonged or strenuous outdoor physical exertion	**AVOID** prolonged or strenuous outdoor physical exertion	**MIN** outd
Elderly, Pregnant Woman, Children	**Normal activities**	**Normal activities**	**MINIMISE** prolonged or strenuous outdoor physical exertion	**MINIMISE** outdoor activity	**AVO** outd
Persons with Chronic Lung Disease, Heart Disease	**Normal activities**	**Normal activities**	**AVOID** prolonged or strenuous outdoor physical exertion	**AVOID** outdoor activity	**AVO** outd

+ Available when air quality is in the Unhealthy range.

The impact of haze is dependent on one's health status, PSI, and the duration and intensity of outdoor activity. Reducing out and physical exertion can help limit the ill effects. Persons who are not feeling well should seek medical attention.

Explanatory notes: **REDUCE** (do less), **MINIMISE** (do as little as possible), **AVOID** (do not do), **PROLONGED** (continuous exposure f **STRENUOUS** (involving a lot of energy or effort)

Current air quality readings and more information are available at **www.haze.gov.sg**.

NEAâ??s guide to planning outdoor activities by PM2.5 band and 24-hour PSI. Image: NEA

What schools do at each PSI level

The plan covers the ministryâ??s kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and special education schools. Each step follows the 24-hour PSI forecast, and schools also change the level and nature of activities through the day as one-hour PM2.5 readings rise and fall. Every classroom has an air purifier.

In the unhealthy band of 101 to 200, schools avoid strenuous outdoor physical activities that take a lot of energy or several hours of continuous exposure. Students who are unwell, or who have lung or heart conditions, are exempted from all outdoor physical activities, and air purifiers are switched on in enclosed indoor spaces. A student or staff member who falls ill waits in an air-conditioned room with an air purifier before being taken to a doctor, and parents are notified.

At very unhealthy levels of 201 to 300, outdoor activities and indoor physical activities both stop, and all students stay in enclosed indoor spaces with air purifiers. If the PSI reaches the hazardous band above 300 during school hours, lessons are scaled down as well. Teachers keep watch for students who are unwell or have existing lung or heart conditions, and parents are expected to make sure children carry their own medication, such as asthma inhalers, or keep them at home.

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School closures and national exams

Closing schools comes into consideration when the next dayâ??s air quality forecast is hazardous, a 24-hour PSI above 300. Any closure is announced alongside the health advisory, and schools contact parents directly, sometimes at short notice. Children whose parents cannot arrange care may still go to school, where teachers supervise them, and school-based student care centres stay open for existing students.

Junior colleges, Millennia Institute, polytechnics, ITE and the autonomous universities follow the same health advisories, and may move outdoor activities indoors, postpone them or cancel them. Their closure decisions work differently because the students are older and most teaching already happens indoors, in spaces such as lecture theatres.

National examinations are rescheduled if schools close, with the new arrangements announced alongside the closure. School candidates hear through their schools, and private candidates hear from the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB). While exams go ahead, every candidate sits papers in an enclosed space with air purifiers, so a sudden turn in the haze does not interrupt a paper. Candidates who are medically certified unwell and cannot sit a paper inform their schools, or SEAB for private candidates, and haze-related illness goes through the same process as any other illness during the exams.

Cleaning the air at home

At home, start with doors and windows. Shutting them when outdoor air turns bad slows the rate at which haze particles get in, and reopening them once the air improves clears the heat and carbon

dioxide that build up in a sealed room, especially a crowded one. Fans and air-conditioners can stay on for cooling, but a window unit that draws unfiltered outside air should have its outdoor intake closed. Mopping and wiping lift settled dust.

A portable air purifier keeps particle levels low in an enclosed space, and works best with a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter. Its Clean Air Delivery Rate (CADR) measures how much clean air it returns to a room. A CADR label carries three figures, for smoke, dust and pollen, and the smoke figure is the one that matters for haze.

The smoke CADR in cubic feet per minute should be at least three times the roomâ??s volume in cubic metres. A 40 sq m room with a 3m ceiling holds 120 cubic metres of air, so it needs a smoke CADR of at least 360, while a 30-cubic-metre bedroom needs at least 90. A higher figure only cleans an enclosed room faster.

Purifiers reach their rated performance only with doors and windows shut and nothing blocking the airflow. Plenty of effective models carry no CADR rating, and for those, the manufacturer should be able to back any claim about removing fine particles. For homes that need more fresh air, a fan-filter unit with a MERV 13 or F7 filter, or better, brings outdoor air in through the filter.

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