

Health risk category for Air Quality Health Index reaches "Serious" level

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has recorded higher than normal air pollution levels since August 31. The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) at some monitoring stations reached the "Serious" health risk category today (September 5). The air pollution levels are expected to remain higher tomorrow (September 6).

Under the influence of a dry continental airstream, the weather in Hong Kong today is fine and very hot, with northwesterly winds bringing an airstream with higher regional background ozone and particulate pollution levels, which is also unfavourable for pollutant dispersion. The intense sunshine enhances photochemical smog activity leading to rapid formation of ozone and fine particulates in the Pearl River Delta region. The high ozone level also promotes the formation of nitrogen dioxide.

According to the Hong Kong Observatory, it will be generally fine and persistently very hot with northwesterly winds tomorrow. It is expected that the regional pollution level will remain higher than normal. With easterly winds strengthening and rainfall increasing in the middle of this week, the air quality will improve gradually.

With a health risk category in the "Very High" or "Serious" levels, children, the elderly and persons with existing heart or respiratory illnesses are advised to reduce physical exertion and outdoor activities to a minimum or avoid such activities. The general public is advised to reduce, or reduce to a minimum, outdoor physical exertion, and to reduce time staying outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. As health effects of air pollutants may vary for individuals, persons who are in doubt or experience discomfort should seek advice from health-care professionals. The public may visit the Centre for Health Protection's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/content/9/460/3557.html) for more information on health effects of air pollution and relevant health advice.

The Education Bureau (EDB) urges all schools to visit the EDB's website for appropriate measures to safeguard students' health and take note of changes in the index. The relevant hyperlink is as follows: www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/about-activities/sch-activities-guidelines/index.html.

When the AQHI is at the "Very High" level, employers of outdoor workers performing heavy manual work are advised to assess the risk of outdoor work and take appropriate preventive measures to protect the health of their employees, such as reducing outdoor physical exertion and the time of their stay outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. At the "Serious" level, employers of all outdoor workers are advised to assess the risk of outdoor work and take appropriate preventive measures to protect the health of their employees.

Members of the public can check the current AQHI readings at the EPD's website (www.aqhi.gov.hk/en.html) or by calling the hotline 2827 8541.