

Weather warning as Karachi air pollution goes dangerously up

Imran Ayub | Published October 24, 2021



High level of dust particles in the air reduce visibility and envelope the Quaid's mausoleum on Saturday. —Online

KARACHI: The city witnessed ‘very unhealthy’ levels of pollution in the air on Saturday, which the meteorological department said could continue for another day or two pushing health experts to warn that such weather conditions could lead to several infections and people should avoid exposing themselves to such an atmosphere to avoid ‘lasting effects’.

The US Consulate Karachi’s Air Quality Monitor Feed posted multiple tweets on its social media platform and in the last tweet weighed air quality to 204 US AQI [air quality index] at 6pm in the city.

Amateur meteorologists and officials said that it was the second-worst air quality recorded in the whole country after Bahawalpur’s where the air quality was recorded at 180 US AQI. The weather experts and officials termed it an impact of change in the wind direction and sounded confident that although it was unhealthy, it was not a new or any abnormal phenomenon.

“It often happens whenever the wind changes its direction,” said Sardar Sarfaraz at the Met office while explaining the reasons behind the fresh weather experience for Karachiites.

Health expert urges citizens to avoid exposure to dusty air

“You can call it hazy or dusty weather and there’s a very obvious reason for such a trend. There’s a high wind pressure from Afghanistan and Central Asia side that led to wind direction from the northwest. Since that particular side has a desert area of Balochistan’s Chaghi, we see there’re dust particles making it hazy and unhealthy.”

Not the smog seen in Lahore

Responding to a question about any comparison between the current weather conditions of Karachi and Lahore, which often witnessed unhealthy levels of pollution in the air mainly during the winter season, Mr Sarfaraz ruled out any parallels between the weather conditions of the two cities calling the current trend in the port city “a temporary one”.

“In Lahore, it’s actually smog which affects the air quality index and the situation often turns worst,” he added.

“That smog is basically emerges as combination of smoke and fog which ultimately creates that atmosphere which lasts several days and we often see it in winter in Lahore. But here it’s not new whenever there’s a change in the wind direction, the city witnesses such dusty or hazy weather conditions. It’s a temporary thing and we hope it will be over within a day or two.”

Lahore in winter often witnesses worst air quality which normally stays from October to February in the Punjab capital when farmers are blamed for setting light to the remnants of their crops, producing smoke which adds to smog.

The situation worsened in November 2019 when Lahore was spotted second after Delhi as the world’s most polluted city on several major and globally recognised air quality ranking sites.

Although the Met office forecast about the prevailing weather conditions may bring a sigh of relief to Karachiites, the health experts warned that even a temporary phenomenon of “very unhealthy” air quality could leave a lasting effect.

“So the best possible thing is that one should avoid exposure to such air,” said Dr Qaiser Sajjad of the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA). “We have already started witnessing a rise in the number of patients of common cold and flu. For those who have to go outside for different reasons, mainly bikers, must take protection and keep their face covered. This weather condition can lead to rhinopharyngitis, throat infection, bronchitis and lungs infection. Those who suffer from nasal allergy should also take care of themselves in these weather conditions.”

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