

Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)

Dos & Don'ts for Arranging Physical Activities During the Health Risk Category at High, Very High and Serious Levels (Applicable to Primary and Secondary Schools)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Launch of the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)

Q1: How does the Education Bureau (EDB) inform schools of the launch of the AQHI?

A1: The AQHI has been in force to replace the Air Pollution Index (API) since 30 December 2013. A letter was issued to schools on 18 December 2013 to inform them of the launch of the AQHI by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-activities/sch-activities-guidelines/letter_to_schs_20131218_eng.pdf. The letter replaces the EDB Circular No. 9/2010 on the API.

Q2: How should schools interpret the information of the AQHI?

A2: The AQHI is a health risk-based air pollution index. To minimise the health risk of air pollution to school children at different developmental stages, a prudent manner in handling school children's health is adopted. The EDB will work with the EPD and other departments to review the health risk of air pollution to school children.

Access to AQHI information

Q3: How can schools get access to the latest AQHI or its forecast?

A3: The EPD calculates and releases the AQHIs every hour for General (Ambient) and Roadside Stations while the health risk forecast is normally updated twice a day at 10:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. for the next 24 hours. Each forecast is reported in two 12-hour time blocks corresponding to the morning and afternoon sessions through the mass media. There may be more frequent updates of the health risk forecast depending on the changes of air pollution situation.

Following the established practice, the EDB will send messages about the air pollution situation to schools through email when the AQHI reaches high, very high or serious level (band 7 or above). Schools can also obtain the latest information on the AQHI or its forecast by visiting the EPD's website: www.aqhi.gov.hk, making use of the AQHI mobile Apps ("HK AQHI") for smartphone/desktop computer programme or by dialling the EPD's "Interactive Voice Recording System" at 2827 8541.

General AQHI

Q4: Which General AQHI Station should schools refer to?

A4: In general, schools may refer to the General AQHI station at the district where the activities are conducted. Schools can browse the EPD's website, www.aqhi.gov.hk, for the locations of air quality monitoring stations.

Roadside AQHI

Q5: Should schools refer to the Roadside AQHI?

A5: In general, schools should avoid arranging school children to have physical activities at places close to busy roads (such as roads of dual traffic with two lanes or more on each side of the road). Under most circumstances, schools should refer to General AQHI unless the playground for physical activities is close to busy roads and is not shielded from direct impact of vehicle emissions by any forms of physical barriers. In general, schools do not need to refer to the Roadside AQHI if:

- i. the separation between the playground and the busy road is not less than 15m;
- ii. the playground and busy road is separated by buildings (such as the external walls of a school building); or
- iii. the playground and busy road is separated by physical barrier of not less than 2.5m in height (such as a fence) and the distance between the playground and the road is not less than 8m.

Q6: For those schools that need to refer to the Roadside AQHI, which Roadside Station should they refer to?

A6: The EPD has set up three Roadside Stations at Mong Kok, Central and Causeway Bay, which are all sited at roadside in built-up urban areas. The data collected from these stations are representative of the roadside air quality in areas with heavy traffic. Schools in urban areas may refer to the Roadside AQHI measured by a neighbouring station.

School children with heart, respiratory or chronic illnesses

Q7: Should school children with heart, respiratory or chronic illnesses engage in physical exertion or outdoor activities when the AQHI reaches "High" level (band 7)?

A7: School children with heart, respiratory or chronic illnesses are advised to reduce to the minimum outdoor physical exertion and the time of staying outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic, and take more breaks during physical activities. If the signs and symptoms associated with air pollution are observed (e.g. eye irritation, coughing, chest tightness, etc.), school children should stop participating in physical activities and preferably stay indoors. Medical advice from registered doctors can be sought if necessary. Schools should maintain good communication with parents

and keep them informed of the arrangement of physical activities when the health risk reaches different levels.

Q8: Should school children with heart, respiratory or chronic illnesses engage in physical exertion or outdoor activities when the AQHI reaches “Very high” level or above (band 8 – 10 or above)?

A8: No. School children with heart, respiratory or chronic illnesses should avoid physical exertion and staying outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. Medical advice from registered doctors can be sought if necessary. Schools should maintain good communication with parents and keep them informed of the arrangement of physical activities when the health risk reaches different levels.

Arrangements for Physical Activities when the AQHI reaches “High” or “Very high” level (band 7 or 8-10)

Q9: Should PE lessons (practical skills), games days, athletics meets/swimming galas, ball games competitions or outdoor education camps, etc. be arranged when the AQHI reaches “High” or “Very high” level (band 7 or 8-10)?

A9: When the AQHI reaches “High” or “Very high” level (band 7 or 8-10), school children are advised to reduce or reduce to the minimum outdoor physical exertion, and the time of staying outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. Schools may arrange PE lessons (practical skills), games days, athletics meets/swimming galas, ball games competitions or outdoor education camps, provided that the intensity and the duration are to be adjusted. For instance, schools may cancel long-distance events in athletics meets (1,500m or above) or swimming galas (200m or above). Schools may also reduce the number of heats leading to finals and take more rest breaks/time or shorten the duration of activities, etc.

School children are advised to adopt nasal breathing and to drink adequate water before, during and after exercise. When school children have symptoms associated with air pollution (e.g. eye irritation, coughing, chest tightness, etc.), they should stop participating in physical activities and preferably stay indoors. Medical advice from registered doctors can be sought if necessary.

Q10: Should cross-country or road-running race, etc. be arranged when the AQHI reaches “High” or “Very high” level (band 7 or 8-10)?

A10: When the AQHI reaches “High” level (band 7), schools may arrange cross-country or road-running race, etc., provided that the intensity and the duration are to be adjusted and the duration of activities is to be shortened. When the AQHI reaches “Very high” level (band 8-10), schools should suspend, cancel or postpone such activities.

When school children have symptoms associated with air pollution (e.g. eye irritation, coughing, chest tightness, etc.), they should stop participating in physical activities and preferably stay indoors. Medical advice from registered doctors can be sought if necessary.

Arrangements for Physical Activities when the AQHI reaches “Serious” level (band 10+)

Q11: Should PE lessons (Practical skills), games days, athletics meets/swimming galas, ball games competitions or outdoor education camps, etc. be arranged when the AQHI reaches “Serious” level (band 10+)?

A11: No. School children are advised to avoid physical exertion and staying outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. Schools are advised to suspend, cancel or postpone physical activities. Alternatively, schools may arrange learning and teaching activities of the strands other than motor skills, for instance, theoretical learning of PE. Please refer to the “Physical Education Key Learning Area: Learning Topics in the Six Strands” (2013) for details, http://cd1.edb.hkedcity.net/cd/pe/tc/scope_of_learning/LT_SS%20eng.pdf

Consideration of Arranging Physical Activities

Q12: What are the considerations of schools for arranging physical activities when the AQHI reaches “High” level or above (band 7 or above)?

A12: Schools may refer to the latest AQHI at districts where physical activities are organised, and prepare for contingency arrangement in advance. Schools may also consider to:

- utilise the indoor sports facilities provided by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), Housing Department (HD) or Home Affairs Bureau Private Recreational Leases (PRL);
- plan/change the time of activities to the morning session as the air pollution levels are relatively lower;
- adjust the exercise intensity and duration;
- take more breaks/time, reduce the number of heats leading to finals; or
- suspend, cancel or postpone physical activities, etc.

Participating in Inter-school Sports Competitions/Public Examination (Practical Component)

Q13: How can schools obtain the information of arranging inter-school sports competitions/public examination (practical component) when the AQHI reaches different levels?

A13: The information of the “Dos and Don’ts for Arranging Physical Activities” has been disseminated to organisations, including the Hong Kong Schools Sports Federation,

the Hong Kong Schools Dance Association, and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. Schools may contact the respective organisations direct for latest arrangement.

Use of Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and Housing Department (HD) Sports Facilities

Q14: Under what weather conditions should schools suspend, cancel or postpone its activities held at the LCSD or the HD sports facilities?

A14: Under the following circumstances, school should suspend, cancel or postpone their activities held at the LCSD or the HD sports venues –

- i. The EDB announces class suspension of school(s);
- ii. The Hong Kong Observatory issues Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal;
- iii. The Hong Kong Observatory issues Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above;
- iv. AQHI reaches “Serious” level (band 10+);
- v. Serious flooding in the district where the school or the venue is located; or
- vi. The Hong Kong Observatory issues thunderstorm warning (for outdoor facilities).

Physical Education Section

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