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## Health Departments put on haze alert

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Health Ministry will provide immediate back-up to any State Health Department when the need arises following the worsening haze situation.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today all State Health Departments had been asked to be on alert since the haze problem started.

He said this after a Press conference at Wisma MCA on a conference to be organised by the MCA.

Asked about the haze situation in Sarawak, which was later placed under the state of emergency, Chua said his Ministry would provide more manpower if advised by the State director of health.

The Press conference was held at 10am, just before Sarawak was placed under the state of emergency.

On Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call yesterday that Malaysians start wearing respiratory masks, Chua said with the haze problem reaching unprecedented levels, preventive measures had to be taken to minimise the risk to health.

"I still see motorcyclists and general workers in Kuala Lumpur not taking adequate protection and it's worrying," he said.

He also advised employers to distribute protective masks to workers and schoolchildren.

He said there was a link between the increasing Air Pollutant Index (API) with the number of health problems reported recently.

Yesterday, Chua revealed that between Sept 1 and 15 when the API rose from the unhealthy level (between 100 and 200) to very unhealthy stage (201 to 300) in the Klang Valley, there was a sharp increase in the number of haze-related health cases.

A total of 2,747 adults and 3,795 children were treated at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital for upper respiratory tract infection, asthma and conjunctivitis.

"This does not actually show the complete picture of the situation as there are other indirectly related health problems such as giddiness, heart problems and skin allergies which have not been taken into account," he said.

He added that the figures did not include those who had resorted to self-medication.

The Ministry today released a pamphlet informing the public on the precautions to be taken during the present haze problem.