

Delhi air pollution: City doctors report rise in joints pain, flu, respiratory and eye issues

) With particulate matter (PM) 2.5 concentrations averaging 488 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m3) in the national capital post Diwali, city doctors on Tuesday reported a rise in cases of respiratory issues, eye irritation, flu as well as joint pain among others. According to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the overall Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi-NCR remained in the 'very poor' category, reaching 400 a day after Diwali festivities. While the overall AQI stood at 347, several areas recorded levels in the 'severe' category. "High pollution levels can worsen joint disease. Pollutants such as particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone trigger inflammation and oxidative stress in the body, which can aggra-

vate pain, stiffness, and fatigue in people with arthritis," Uma Kumar, Head of the Department of Rheumatology, AIIMS, New Delhi, told IANS. The expert urged arthritis patients to avoid outdoor activities, wear an N95 mask, and use air purifiers with good indoor ventilation to prevent flare-ups during high pollution days. The high pollution levels are exacerbating breathing and other respiratory issues among people, doctors reported. They noted that toxic gases and chemical particles currently present in the air are causing problems like coughs, colds, headaches, dizziness, fatigue, insomnia, and eye irritation. General physician Dr. Amit Kumar said that due to pollution, the number of patients in every chest



physician's outpatient department has increased by approximately 30 per cent. The concentration of toxic gases like carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, nitrogen dioxide, ammonia, and benzene in the atmosphere has reached dangerous levels. These gases are not only increasing breathing problems but are also seriously affecting the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs.

Dr. Kumar explained that five years ago, smoking was the primary cause of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), but now pollution has become the biggest cause. He said that even if a person doesn't smoke, due to current pollution levels, they are inhaling toxic smoke equivalent to six cigarettes daily. According to him, one cigarette produces pollution equivalent to approx-

imately 64.8 AQI, while in the current situation, a person is inhaling smoke equivalent to approximately 5.83 cigarettes. City doctors reported that 300 to 350 patients are reaching the OPD daily, complaining of shortness of breath, cough, or chest tightness. Due to increased humidity, dust and smoke particles are unable to rise into the atmosphere, creating a blanket of haze and smog.

Environment Expert Sharanjeet Kaur told IANS that the air quality is likely to worsen in the coming days due to atmospheric conditions. "The AQI of Delhi has been very poor today, across 345, 350. If the situation remains the same till evening and if there is no wind, and speed remains low, then it will be difficult for the pollutants to disperse, and the pollutants may go into an even more severe category in the next 2-3 days," Kaur said. The health experts advised people to avoid going out in the morning and late evening, wear masks, and use air purifiers or plants at home. Children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing medical conditions should exercise special caution, as pollution has a greater impact on their health.

Boy dies of hepatitis in J&K's Kulgam, authorities depute teams to check spread

A boy died of hepatitis infection on Friday in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district as the health department deputed teams to the area to prevent the spread of the disease. Officials said that a 13-year-old boy died while his sibling was hospitalised after contracting Hepatitis in Katrasoo village of Kulgam district. "Three siblings of a family in Katrasoo village of Kulgam district were infected with Hepatitis. They were first taken to a nearby hospital and later referred to the District Hospital Kulgam. "Two of them were shifted to the Children's Hospital Bemina, Srinagar. One boy

died while a girl is under observation at the Children's Hospital Bemina. The third sibling has recovered," officials said. Meanwhile, Showkat Hussain, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of Kulgam, said that health teams have been deputed to the area. The CMO said the infection is likely Hepatitis A or E, which spreads through contaminated water and poor sanitation. "There is no need to panic, everything is under control. We appeal to people to boil water before drinking and maintain proper hand hygiene," the CMO said. It must be mentioned that after the recent floods, con-

taminated water from overflowing streams and rivers is likely to have flown into many drinking water reservoirs and filtration plants, resulting in contamination of the drinking water sources. Health department officials throughout the Valley have advised people to use sufficiently boiled water for drinking after receiving it from taps, springs, etc. It is common for contagious diseases to spread after floods in the Valley. Before vaccines were developed for cholera and other water-borne diseases, Kashmir used to suffer hundreds of deaths in the aftermath of floods, especially in low-lying areas,

due to unsafe drinking water. Historical records bear witness to the fact that Kashmiris used to abandon travel and sit in large numbers at the graveyards to mourn the hundreds of dead killed by water-borne epidemics. Thanks to advances in medical science and the presence of primary, secondary and tertiary medical facilities in the Valley, epidemics of water-borne diseases have become nightmares of the past. Health department teams fan out immediately to areas reporting water-borne illnesses and bring them under control before these could assume epidemic proportions.

Air Pollution: Follow These Tips For Better Respiratory Health During Festive Season

Air pollution typically rises during festive seasons, especially Raksha bandhan, due to increased use of fireworks, which release harmful gases and particulate matter into the atmosphere. Combined with other seasonal factors like lower wind speeds and cooler temperatures, this can lead to smog and poor air quality, especially in densely populated urban areas. The pollutants from firecrackers such as sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter pose respiratory health risks. While festivities are a time for joy and celebration, taking steps to protect respiratory health can help mitigate the negative effects of pollution during these times. Keep reading as we share tips to help protect you from air pollution. 9 Tips to help protect your respiratory system during festive season 1. Stay indoors during peak pollution hours Avoid going outside during peak pollution hours, typically in the evening when firecrackers are most commonly set off.

Staying indoors during these times reduces your exposure to air pollutants, helping protect your respiratory health. If you must go out, try to minimise the time spent outside. 2. Use air purifiers at home Air purifiers equipped with HEPA filters can remove harmful particles and pollutants from indoor air. Using an air purifier in your home, especially in frequently used rooms, can create a cleaner environment for breathing, reducing respiratory stress caused by external pollution. 3. Wear a protective mask outdoors Wearing an N95 or N99 mask when stepping outside can significantly reduce inhalation of air-borne pollutants. These masks filter out fine particulate matter, like PM2.5, which can otherwise penetrate deep into the lungs and cause respiratory issues. Make sure your mask fits properly for maximum protection. 4. Include antioxidant-rich foods in your diet Foods high in antioxi-

dants, such as berries, nuts, and leafy greens, can help combat oxidative stress caused by pollution. Antioxidants neutralise free radicals generated from pollutant exposure, strengthening your immune system and supporting respiratory health. 5. Practice deep breathing exercises indoors Regular deep breathing exercises, like pranayama, can strengthen lung capacity and promote lung detoxification. Practicing these exercises indoors, away from polluted air, helps clear out any pollutants trapped in the respiratory system and improves lung function over time. 6. Stay hydrated Drinking plenty of water helps keep mucous membranes in the respiratory tract moist, making it easier to filter out pollutants and irritants. Hydration also supports the body's natural detoxification processes, flushing out toxins from exposure to pollution. 7. Limit firecracker usage Minimising the use of firecrackers during Diwali not only helps

reduce pollution but also sets an example for sustainable festivities. Many cities and communities are encouraging green celebrations, and by choosing quieter alternatives, you can contribute to a cleaner, healthier environment. 8. Use nasal rinses to clear airways Rinsing your nasal passages with a saline solution can help flush out any pollutants and allergens that may have been inhaled. Nasal rinses keep your airways clear, reduce irritation, and are especially helpful if you've been outdoors for extended periods. 9. Keep indoor plants to purify the air Indoor plants like spider plants, peace lilies, and snake plants naturally absorb certain toxins and improve indoor air quality. Having these plants in your living space can create a healthier environment by reducing some airborne contaminants. Keep these tips in mind for better respiratory and overall health during this time.

Smokers don't find nicotine bad for kids

While most adults know nicotine is bad for children, smokers and some other individuals aren't convinced of this fact, according to a US study that suggests a need for more public education about the risks of tobacco. Overall, 83 per cent of adults understand that nicotine is "definitely harmful" to children, the analysis of national survey data from almost 12,000 US adults found. But adults who used multiple tobacco products were 60 per cent more likely than nonsmokers to say nicotine was "not harmful" for children. "It is important that all adults, not just parents of young children or tobacco product users, understand that nicotine is very harmful to children," said lead study author Catherine Kemp, a public health researcher at Georgia State University in Atlanta. "There is no established safe level of nicotine exposure for children," Kemp said by email. Nicotine exposure can cause upset stomach, nausea, vomiting, changes in heart rate and blood pressure, breathing problems, and seizures in kids and can be fatal at high doses, Kemp noted. Chronic exposure can lead to heart problems, asthma, developmental and behavioural disorders, an increased risk of addiction to other drugs. In the study, women were 60 per cent more likely than men to recognise that nicotine was "definitely harmful" to kids. Men, meanwhile, were 40 per cent more likely than women to think nicotine wasn't harmful or say they weren't sure about the risks. Compared to adults with a college degree, people with only a high school diploma were more than twice as likely to say nicotine was not harmful to kids, researchers report in Pediatrics. And when people didn't finish high school, they were three times more likely to think nicotine wasn't dangerous, compared to college graduates. Race was also associated with how adults thought about the risks of nicotine exposure for kids. Compared to white adults, Hispanic and African-American survey participants were much less likely to believe nicotine was definitely harmful. Most often, kids are exposed to nicotine from a parent or another person who lives in their home, Kemp said. In the study, approximately one-third of tobacco users had at least one young child at home. One limitation of the study is that the survey focused only on the general question of whether nicotine might be harmful to children under 13 years old, the authors note. Researchers lacked specific data on how people thought about the nicotine risk of specific tobacco products. Another drawback is that the study lacks data on what's behind people's beliefs about nicotine, so it's unclear how much some individuals might say it's not dangerous for kids out of denial versus out of a genuine lack of understanding of the risks, said Dr. Geetha Raghuvver, a cardiologist at Children's Mercy Hospital and professor at the University of Missouri Kansas City School of Medicine. Men, for example, might be less aware of the risks than women because they're less likely to take kids to checkups and hear about the dangers first-hand from a pediatrician, Raghuvver, who wasn't involved in the study, said by email.

Poshan Maah initiative significantly advanced India's fight against malnutrition: Govt

The Poshan Maah initiative, under the Poshan Abhiyaan, has significantly advanced India's fight against malnutrition, the Union government said. Launched in March 2018 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu, Poshan Abhiyaan is a flagship multi-ministerial convergence mission designed to place nutrition at the forefront of India's national development agenda. The Poshan Maah initiative has played a key role in building a healthier and stronger nation through

nutrition, reducing stunting among children. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21) reports reduced stunting among children under five from 38.4 per cent to 35.5 per cent. As per the NFHS-5 report, underweight prevalence in children dropped from 35.8 per cent to 32.1 per cent. "The Poshan Maah initiative, a cornerstone of the Poshan Abhiyaan, has significantly advanced India's fight against malnutrition by promoting dietary diversity, community engagement, and

technology-driven solutions," the government said. "Poshan Maah empowers communities and schools to foster sustainable nutritional practices for a healthier, stronger nation," it added. On Wednesday, PM Modi launched the 8th Rashtriya Poshan Maah, along with the Swasth Nari Sashakt Parivar Abhiyan, aligning strongly with his vision of Sashakt Nari and Suposhit Bharat. This year's edition highlights innovative and inclusive approaches to address malnutrition and

promote sustainable health. It aims to create awareness on obesity by reducing sugar and oil consumption to build a healthier India. "Obesity is becoming a big problem for our country. In the coming years, every third person will be a victim to it. We must save ourselves from obesity. Therefore, I would like to give you a small suggestion, use 10 per cent less oil in cooking," PM Modi said during his Independence Day speech in August. The Poshan Maah will focus on early childhood

care and education (ECCE)/Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi (PBBP). Further, with the EK Ped Maa Ke Naam initiative, it aims to integrate environmental sustainability with nutrition awareness, encouraging tree plantation and eco-friendly practices to support long-term health and well-being. The campaign also aims to enhance feeding practices for children under two years to improve nutrition outcomes, emphasising optimal breastfeeding and complementary feeding. In

addition, it will promote active male participation in nutrition awareness and caregiving roles to foster shared responsibility in family and community health. Poshan Maah is a nationwide initiative to promote nutrition and healthy living, and everyone can play a vital role in making it a success by educating the community, planting nutrition gardens and promoting kitchen gardens, supporting Anganwadi Centres and ASHA Workers by volunteering at local Anganwadi centres.

EDUCATION PLUS Digital Revolution to Rural India

Launched as a cornerstone of the Digital India programme, CSCs have evolved into the world's largest rural digital service network. Empowering lakhs of entrepreneurs — especially women — they now represent a scalable, sustainable model for inclusive growth, skilling and grassroots digital delivery India has been in news for building and promoting the Digital Infrastructure as a public good. It is one of the few countries to have offered such digital infrastructure with connected application to other countries in the world for ensuring that such benefits reach citizens of nations with poor or low level of digital penetration. Some of these are disruptive, as UPI, Digital Locker, Aadhaar, Cowin etc. There is, however, another side to using the digital initiative/programme for building a unique model of sustainable social enterprise, especially in the rural areas. The Government programme of Common Service Centre (CSC) is designed on this framework of skilling and using the service delivery as the incentive for entrepreneurship development. Out of about more than six lakh CSCs, more than one lakh are operated and managed by women. Women-led ICT-enabled enterprises on such a large scale and geographically equitably spread across the country is unique and probably first of its kind in the world. Digital service delivery model through a local entrepreneur (CSC) enabling citizens to access most of the G2C and B2C close to the place of residence in India is today the world's largest network. Started in the year 2006, the real momentum to the CSC scheme was provided after 2014 when CSC became an integral part of the 'Digital India' programme and got the desired support at the political level. Government took steps to make the programme a "movement" rather than a scheme and generated passion and commitment amongst the new breed of entrepreneurs to serve the society and build sustainable enterprises. There were only 68,000 functional CSCs before the year 2014 which has increased to more than six lakhs as on March 2025. Garnering Private Capital Government did not provide any capital support required for the infrastructure to start such enterprises but utilised the network to deliver various services to citizens. With an average capital investment of Rs 2 lakhs for each CSC, the total private investment in this scheme has been to the tune of Rs 12,000 crore. Government support enablement to catalyse the private capital investment from a large number of entrepreneurs, that too mainly in the rural areas, is exemplary and a lesson/case study to take similar initiatives in other areas such as agriculture and allied sectors and mobilise private capital for investment for larger public good. Government service delivery through the CSC has evolved over a long period of time. Even today some States are unable or unwilling to deliver the G2C through the CSC network. In such States either the service delivery framework is still underdeveloped or being delivered through other channels. The good thing is that at GOI level, almost all the Ministries/departments are utilising the CSC network to deliver the services to the citizen. Aadhaar Registration and Updates Initially the sustainability and enthusiasm for the entrepreneur was by enabling Aadhaar registration for citizens. More than 20 crore of Aadhaar registrations were done through CSC, which helped in increasing the credibility of CSC entrepreneurs in the community as well as increased their income substantially. About 40,000 CSCs at some point were doing Aadhaar registration. They also played a significant role in registration of school-going children and the new-born which the Government was unable to get through its other channels. This service was stopped and resulted in a big loss of business to the CSC entrepreneur, besides non-utilisation of the capital invested (each Aadhaar centre required a capital of Rs 3 lakh). Subsequently, only Aadhaar updation was allowed through selected CSCs (those working as banking correspondent — BC). Stoppage of Aadhaar was a great setback for the entire CSC ecosystem. Financial Services G2C for the CSC was only an enabler and did not provide the adequate resource for developing a sustainable business model. CSC then started to focus on other services as BC and B2C. The banking, insurance and pension services did help to a great extent in enhancing the income of the CSC entrepreneur. Not only public sector banks but banks such as HDFC supported in promoting the delivery of financial services to citizens through the CSC. HDFC MD even visited many CSCs and set up an exclusive team at every level to support the CSC in delivering their products and services (PSB MDs do not even visit their branches). Similarly, for the insurance services HDFC Ergo and India First were the first few to use the CSC network. IRDAI, however, for the first time enabled a CSC to work as Broker — deliver products of all the insurance companies — and framed guidelines for the same. Citizens can now pay premium for the insurance policies and purchase new policies of Life and Non-Life through the CSC. Delivery of financial services through the CSC became a game changer as the BC can put up a board of the concerned Bank which enhanced the footfalls significantly and increased revenue. Digital Literacy and Educational Services Government scheme of PMGDISA — digital literacy programme for training 6 crore citizens through the CSC network transformed the CSC into a digital Knowledge Hub. The CSC could improve on the infrastructure — 5-10 computers — and identify a new gamut of long-term service delivery — educational services. PMGDISA redefined the CSC delivery framework and a number of service providers like NIELIT, NIOS, IGNOU, Symbiosis, IIT Mumbai got associated in making their courses available to the citizen through the CSC. The launch of CSC Bal Vidyalaya — more than 3000 — is another step in a similar direction. Concept of school without teacher — promoting education through a facilitator using technology — has been tried in these Bal Vidyalayas. CSC could support those children/citizens who are weak in studies/unable to go to school or college or not allowed to go but desire to study. Remote proctoring exam was first time introduced in the country through CSC and benefitted a large number of girls/women who could not or were not allowed to go to the examination centre which in many cases were 100-200 km away from their residence. Educational services through the CSC mainly supported the girls and women from rural India. Even the OBC, SC, ST and minorities got benefitted, which is reflected in the number trained and certified under the digital literacy programme. Delivery of Products CSC has become a reliable instrument for promoting digital and financial inclusion in the country. These are now being utilised extensively by private companies to promote/sell their products across the country in an easy and acceptable format. Large companies as Tata, IFFCO, UNIBIC, Crompton, Symphony etc. are delivering products and finding this non-traditional channel quite exciting. Companies who cannot set up distribution channels and have new products can utilise the CSC channel for competing with established players. For CSC VLEs this is a new stream of business.