

Health Implications of Seasonal Haze in Southeast Asia

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Seasonal haze has plagued Southeast Asia for years. It originates from the agricultural practice of clearing the land by burning that releases particulate matter of less than 2.5 micrometer (PM2.5). PM2.5 is light enough to be transported by wind to neighbouring countries, and small enough to penetrate the alveoli in lungs. However, public awareness of its health implications are still lacking. This presentation aims to increase awareness on the issue by giving an overview of multiple studies. A number of studies have aimed to investigate the health implications of haze. These included observation studies from clinical reports during haze periods and modelling studies of mortality counts. It has been shown that incidences of haze correlates with respiratory distress particularly on aggravating asthma, especially for children and elderly. An estimated 75,000 premature deaths are due to chronic exposure to seasonal haze. However, inconsistent results between different studies and the lack of long-term studies makes it hard to define the causal relationship between haze and its health effects. This makes it hard to push for a campaign against this seasonal haze. Transboundary haze is a serious issue and more toxicological studies needs to be done to improve results and spur a greater need for action.

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