

# Pollution: Schools stop outdoor activities

Shilpy.Arora@timesgroup.com

**Gurgaon:** Winter's run as the season of outdoor fun for schools is over, at least in the national capital region.

Persistently hazardous air pollution has forced schools in Gurgaon to postpone outdoor activities like sports days, picnics and fests. At several schools, wearing a mask is now mandatory; some others have installed centralised air purifiers and pollution measuring devices.

The steps are similar to those taken in Beijing, which shut down on Friday under red alert this month because of dangerously high air pollution. For context, Delhi's air pollution levels have been worse than Beijing's.

Amid rising level of pollution in the city, city schools gear up to protect children from air pollution. While some schools have regularly been monitoring air pollution levels, many have postponed outdoor sports activities and made it mandatory for children to wear masks.

"The number of visits our



**AIR HAZARD:** Similar steps were taken in Beijing

students are making to paediatricians for breathing ailments is increasing, showing how alarming the air quality is," said Manika Sharma, director, The Shri Ram Schools. "We are monitoring air quality. The school will restrict strenuous, aerobic outdoor activity on days when the quality of air reaches hazardous levels," Sharma added. The

school has also urged the parents to stop using private vehicles to drop or pick their children up.

Air pollution levels have been consistently severe all December, forcing some schools to take mitigating measures. Sandy Hooda, co-founder of Vega Schools, said, "We have made provisions at the school to filter PM2.5 and

PM10 particles (fine particles emitted by vehicles and dust that cause lung damage) and keep the carbon dioxide levels under control. The treated air is then delivered to learning and activity spaces through air distribution ducting."

Appreciating the initiatives, Shruti, parent of a 10-year-old boy who suffers from asthma, said, "These are good

---

**Activities like sports days, picnics and fests are postponed. At several schools, wearing a mask is now mandatory**

---

move. My child feels suffocated at the morning assembly. Even though he wears a mask, he feels better indoors. I am happy schools have become sensitive towards asthmatic children."

But for children, this has taken the fun out of school. "I spend more than eight hours in school and love to play soccer. If I don't go out, I feel

bored," said Debashish Ganguly, a 13-year-old who lives in Sector 50.

Peeya Sharma, principal of Ryan International School, Sector 40, said outdoor activities shouldn't be restricted. "Wearing a mask or installing air purifiers are temporary measures. But for long-term benefits, we have to sensitise children about the need to bring down pollution levels.

We educate them about air purifying plants that can be kept indoors. We have such plants on the school premises. We are encouraging children and parents to use carpooling or cycle wherever possible," she said.

Doctors don't approve of children being asked to wear masks all the time.

"There is no evidence that a mask protects you from the ill effects of air pollution. The key is to build immunity, which can be done by allowing children to go for physical activities. We should encourage children to do breathing exercises and take up sports," said Dr Himanshu Garg, a pulmonologist at a private hospital.