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How schools tutor kids to tackle pollution as haze chokes city

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Gurgaon: "Do you know why the air quality is bad?" asked a teacher as she began "Smog Class" in a private school in the city. She continued, "What is smog? How can you stay safe from bad air?" The class continued for 45 minutes, at the end of which she displayed different plants known to purify air that one can put up at home.

INSIDE A 'SMOG CLASS'

Twenty students in the class of 11-year-olds sat in rapt attention, naming stubble burning, cars and crackers as the prime causes of bad air when asked.

The teacher, Soniya Nagpal, explained, "When the rice harvest is over, farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Western UP burn crop stubble, which is a leading cause of smog in our air." She added this was the third year running when air pollution in the NCR had

become intolerable. When she finished speaking, students bombarded her with questions. "When will this end?" "What can we do to ensure we breathe healthy?" With patience, Nagpal replied: "Wear masks when you go out. Maintain plants that purify air at home, as not everyone can afford air purifiers."

City schools are holding special classes to teach stu-

dents about smog, pollution, stubble burning, AQI, PM 2.5, etc. Schools said the impact of these classes has been phenomenal, as students are eager to know how to deal with the problem.

Sudha Goyal, director, The Scottish High School, said: "Every day, in the 'zero period' before school starts, we teach students about changes in atmosphere. Teachers explain kids what is smog or AQI level, and why we need to mo-



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nitior it. Pollution classes shouldn't be part of the curriculum, otherwise students will approach it by rote. This is something which all of us should know"

In one school, a red flag is placed on the field and AQI readings are updated daily outside every classroom. The

school regularly hosts informative sessions to spread awareness about the pollution menace among students. Y K Sindwani, the head of Lan-

cers International School, said: "We regularly teach students about air quality. Daily monitoring of air also helps us modify plans for our outdoor activities."

Other schools have even begun sending notifications to parents on why they should know all about air quality along with their kids. "We sent notifications to parents that were on pollution, and on why students should be taught about it," said Goyal of Scottish High.

Alka Saxena, deputy director (health and wellness), Blue Bells Group of Schools, said: "We've distributed a circular among students on how to be safe during the winter smog, and the need to abstain from the outdoors especially in the morning and evening hours. In the morning assembly, we regularly advise students to wear masks when stepping out. Along with vertical gardens inside the school, a green belt has been created around

the school, in which over 500 plants have been planted."

Vaibhav Kapoor, principal, Ajanta Public School, said: "We sent a circular, telling our students and their parents to avoid artificial or electric gadgets, and to maintain plants that purify air instead." Arti Chopra, principal, Amity International School, Sector 46, concurred, saying, "We've spoken about rising pollution at the morning assembly."

Another institution is holding seminars on the topic. P K Samal, director, Discovery Montessori Preschool, said: "We've conducted seminars with students on which masks they should wear, why stubble burning is bad, how we need to stop burning garbage and ways in which pollution can be brought down."

Where state authorities often appear clueless about the rising menace, the "can-do" spirit of Millennium City has awoken to take up the slack.