

North China cities choked by smog shut factories, stop cars (Update)

December 19 2016, by Helene Franchineau



Chinese paramilitary policemen wearing masks for protection against pollution march as the capital city is shrouded by smog in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Engulfed in choking smog, some northern Chinese cities limited the number of cars on roads and temporarily shut down factories Monday to

reduce air pollution during a national "red alert."

More than 700 companies stopped production in Beijing and traffic police were restricting drivers by monitoring their license plate numbers, state media reported. Dozens of cities closed schools and took other emergency measures after a "red alert" was issued from Friday night to Wednesday for much of northern China.

"The smog has serious repercussions on the lungs and the respiratory system, and it also influences the health of future generations, so under a red alert, it is safer to stay at home rather than go to school," said Li Jingren, a 15-year-old high school student in Beijing.

Authorities in the northern province of Hebei ordered coal and cement plants to temporarily shut down or reduce production. Elsewhere, hospitals prepared teams of doctors to handle an expected surge in cases of pollution-related illnesses.

China's air pollution is blamed on its reliance on coal and emissions from older cars.

"If you are tracking back to the first day of this episode, you can see that the layer of the smog (in Beijing) is moving slowly from the south to the urban area in Beijing and then to the north," said Dong Liansai, a climate campaigner with Greenpeace in Beijing. "You can easily find the large deployment (of smog) in the regions south of Beijing."



People, some wearing masks for protection against air pollution, walk on a pedestrian overhead bridge in Beijing as the capital of China is shrouded by heavy smog Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Engulfed in choking smog, some northern Chinese cities limited the number of cars on roads and temporarily shut down factories on Monday to cut down pollution during a national "red alert." More than 700 companies stopped production in Beijing and traffic police were restricting drivers by monitoring their license plate numbers, state media reported. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Dong said emissions from factories in nearby provinces were the main cause of the smog choking the capital.

The smog had earlier grounded flights in some cities and closed highways due to low visibility.

On Sunday, news websites said the number of children being taken to Beijing hospitals with breathing trouble soared. Photos showed waiting

rooms crowded with parents carrying children who wore face masks.



Chinese women wearing masks for protection against air pollution walk through Ritan Park shrouded by dense smog in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Members of the public closely watch levels of PM_{2.5}, particles measuring 2.5 microns across that are easily inhaled and damage lung tissue.

The alert, this winter's first, lasts through Wednesday. Red is the highest level on the four-tier system prescribing actions taken to reduce the smog.

Authorities in Jinan, south of Tianjin, raised that city's alert to the second-highest level Sunday after the city "basically disappeared" in the haze, the newspaper Jilu Evening News reported. Photos on its website showed downtown office towers as ghostly silhouettes at midday.

Beijing and other cities have tried to improve air quality by switching power plants from coal to natural gas and rolling out fleets of electric buses and taxis.



Chinese people wearing masks for protection against pollution walk at Ritan Park shrouded by heavy smog in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A man wearing a mask for protection against pollution exercise at Ritan Park during a heavily polluted day in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A man wearing a mask for protection against air pollution walks on a pedestrian overhead bridge in Beijing as the capital of China is shrouded by heavy smog Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Engulfed in choking smog, some northern Chinese cities limited the number of cars on roads and temporarily shut down factories on Monday to cut down pollution during a national "red alert." More than 700 companies stopped production in Beijing and traffic police were restricting drivers by monitoring their license plate numbers, state media reported. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A man carries his child squats outside the respiratory and emergency room as others wait to see doctors at a children's hospital in Beijing, Sunday, Dec. 18, 2016. A smog-shrouded Chinese city canceled airline flights Sunday due to poor visibility and many parents took children to hospitals on the second day of a pollution alert across the country's north. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A woman puts on a mask for protection against air pollution while walking on a pedestrian overhead bridge in Beijing as the capital of China is shrouded by heavy smog Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Engulfed in choking smog, some northern Chinese cities limited the number of cars on roads and temporarily shut down factories on Monday to cut down pollution during a national "red alert." More than 700 companies stopped production in Beijing and traffic police were restricting drivers by monitoring their license plate numbers, state media reported. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Chinese people wearing masks for protection against pollution exercise at Ritan Park during a heavily polluted day in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A Chinese couple carry their child squad outside the respiratory and emergency room as others wait to see doctors at a children's hospital in Beijing, Sunday, Dec. 18, 2016. A smog-shrouded Chinese city canceled airline flights Sunday due to poor visibility and many parents took children to hospitals on the second day of a pollution alert across the country's north. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Parents carrying their children wait to see doctors at a children's hospital in Beijing, Sunday, Dec. 18, 2016. A smog-shrouded Chinese city canceled airline flights Sunday due to poor visibility and many parents took children to hospitals on the second day of a pollution alert across the country's north. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A Chinese wearing a mask for protection against pollution exercises at Ritan Park as capital city is shrouded by heavy smog in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A woman and a child wearing masks for protection against pollution walk past trees shrouded by smog at Ritan Park in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A woman and a child wearing masks play chess games at Ritan Park during a heavily polluted day in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 19, 2016. Chinese cities are limiting the number of cars on roads and have temporarily shut down factories to cut down pollution during a national "red alert" for smog. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

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