

Smog-buster kits to keep stars fit

By Rebecca Williams | July 16, 2008 09:00am

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AUSTRALIA'S swimmers will be kitted out with humidifier masks, nasal sprays and eye drops to prevent illness en route to Beijing and to help combat pollution.

In the latest move to keep the swimmers fit and firing, team medicos are taking every precaution by dispatching the kits to help ward off potential infection on the team's long flights to Kuala Lumpur and Beijing.

But the medical tools are also expected to help the swimmers cope with the pollution in Beijing should they succumb to the smoggy conditions.

The team's moves follow the extraordinary lengths distance ace Grant Hackett has gone to to keep his health in check for Beijing.

Hackett revealed recently he regularly wore humidifier masks on planes, shunned public areas and avoided touching hand-rails unnecessarily to help avoid the health problems he's had in the past.



Deep breathing ... swimmer Grant Hackett will have a medical arsenal to help cope with the Beijing smog.

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Swimming Australia's performance science manager Bernard Savage said flights were one of the easiest ways to pick up illness.

"If you are on an aircraft with 200 people or more then there's every chance that someone has some sort of cold or flu or bug that could be going around," Savage said.

"We'll give them all some saline nasal spray to keep their nose moist, as well as some eye drops and a humidifier. It's just another way to tick all the boxes to avoid possible chances for infection to get in."

The humidifier is a mask worn while flying, which re-humidifies the dry air being inhaled.

"When they are breathing in dry, air-conditioned air in an aircraft, it dries out the upper respiratory tract," Savage said. "We are trying to make sure that moisture is maintained so that you don't provide an avenue for infection to get in."

Savage also expected the kits to provide a safeguard against the pollution in Beijing.

The AOC has screened all of Australia's athletes for respiratory conditions in the lead-up to the Games to ensure they will be prepared to prevent attacks and to make sure they comply with IOC medication requirements.

"The conditions are probably going to be variable over there, but we are just trying to cover all contingencies with that," Savage said.

"If it is bad, we will be advising them to use these (masks) as well as the saline nasal spray to keep the nose from drying out and the eye drops for keeping the eyes moist.

"It will be a comfort thing, but particularly for people who are asthmatic or who have the potential to get environmental asthma from the conditions.

"That will be one of the first steps in trying to prevent them getting to the stage where they need to be medicated or need more medical intervention."

Savage said the swimmers would also be advised to stay indoors during the day and use village transport to minimise the impact of the heat.

Recovery is also expected to play a key role in helping the swimmers' medal bid, with an ice bath being shipped to Beijing and the team's pre-Games training camp in Kuala Lumpur.

"The ice bath can be quite an important part of their recovery protocol and what they do after racing," Savage said.