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'SOLAR MACULOPATHY'

# MANY 'UNWELL' AFTER VIEWING SOLAR ECLIPSE

But Health Ministry says no one has sought treatment at clinics or hospitals

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**S**OCIAL media has been flooded with messages from people complaining about feeling unwell after viewing the annular solar eclipse on Thursday.

Some observers said that those feeling ill had viewed the astronomical event without eye protection.

The Health Ministry said yesterday that there had been no reported case of people seeking treatment at health facilities following the eclipse.

In a written response to the *New Sunday Times*, Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said that direct viewing of the eclipse without eye protection might cause injury to the retina (macula) of the eyes, a condition commonly called *solar retinopathy* (or, more specif-



Children viewing the annular eclipse through glasses distributed by Planetarium Negara in Tanjung Piai, Johor, on Thursday. PIC BY HAIRUL ANUAR RAHIM

ically, *solar maculopathy*).

"The effect can be (felt) several days after the incident, when the patient may complain of central vision blurriness."

He said there would be a spontaneous recovery over three to six months afterwards, but it might be incomplete, as the central blurriness and distortion of images could be permanent.

"(However), there has been no such case reported at any health facility since the eclipse on Dec 26."

He said if symptoms, especially blurring of vision, arose after

viewing the eclipse, sufferers should seek help at a health clinic or hospital.

Dr Noor Hisham advised against the use of home remedies to treat the condition, as they could worsen symptoms.

"The best (course of action to take) is to seek medical help. Treatment would depend on the condition identified."

As to whether viewing the eclipse would pose a greater health risk to any group, such as senior citizens or pregnant women, Dr Noor Hisham said that in the context of unprotected direct

viewing of a solar eclipse (sustained light exposure), there was no particular risk group.

On Dec 27, the NST reported that the rare solar eclipse, which formed "a ring of fire" in the sky, last occurred over two decades ago. The ring of fire formed for three minutes during the maximum stage of the annular solar eclipse, when the sun, moon and Earth were aligned.

The main observation locations of the eclipse in Malaysia were Tanjung Piai in Johor, Serian in Sarawak and the National Planetarium here.