

Exposed to Volcanic Ash, Many Merapi IDPs Suffer Eye Irritation

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SLEMAN (KU) - Volcanic ashes from the eruption of Mt. Merapi since Tuesday (26/10) has caused eye irritation (conjunctivitis) in many people. This became known after an ophthalmologist team from Faculty of Medicine UGM in cooperation with the Association of Indonesian Eye Specialists (Perdami) of the Province, and Eye Hospital of dr. YAP conducted free eye examination and treatment in barracks of Internally Displaced Persons in Wukirsari and Hargobinangun on Sunday (31/10).

"We found out that about 25 percent of IDPs suffer from eye irritation," said Chairman of Perdami, Prof. Dr. dr. Suhardjo, S.U., Sp. M (K) who was met on the sidelines of the free eye check up in Village Hall of Wukirsari, Cangkringan.

According to Suhardjo, no severe case was found. Therefore, he concluded that the pouring ashes did not cause serious problems. However, he did not check the condition of the people in other locations. "Most suffer from irritation. One or two people who got bits of sand in their eyes have already been treated," said Suhardjo.

The team also gave mental support to the people. Although volcanic ash contains sulfur and other chemical compounds, it is not too dangerous for eye health. Nonetheless, he suggested that people always get their eyes checked if the eyes are sore. "If you feel there is something in the eye, itching, slightly blurred vision, or red eyes, just see the doctor immediately," he said.

In this free health check up, the Faculty sent 12 ophthalmologists and several candidates of optometrists as well as dozens of students of Pharmacy UGM. The team is divided into two groups and placed in Wukirsari and Hargobinangun. In Wukirsari, Children, parents and the elder people

came to the free service.

Ngatiah (48) from Pangukrejo said she came after her vision was slightly blurred. "It's a little blurry, but I didn't do anything about it," said the mother of two children. She described that as volcanic ashes poured on her village adjacent to the village of the late *Mbah* Maridjan, the mountain keeper, she and her husband ran for life. At that moment, she was not aware if volcanic ashes got into her eyes. "At that time, we just ran away," she said innocently.

Now, Ngatiah felt her eyesight is better. "My sight is clearer now," she replied with a smile and ran away to avoid the pouring rain to return to her barrack.

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