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Alarming rise in people with allergies

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KUALA LUMPUR: Symptoms range from mild irritation to life-threatening attacks. Triggers can be something as common as dust or nuts. One-third of the population has one form or another of allergy.

And according to a World Health Organisation (WHO) report, children are the most common sufferers and the most vulnerable.

The Malaysian Society of Allergology and Immunology (MSAI) president Assoc Prof Dr Ranbir Kaulsai said that Malaysia was moving in lock step with the rest of the world in an alarming increase in the number of people with allergies.

"By 2020, it's expected that half the population will be allergic to something if current trends continue," he told the *New Straits Times* upon his return from the recent World Allergy Congress in Bangkok.

This year's conference will be held here in March.

He said that according to WHO statistics released at the conference, up to 50 per cent of the world's teenagers were already suffering from airway



allergies like allergic rhinitis and asthma.

Globally, it's estimated that asthma affects more than 300 million people with another 100 million patients expected by 2025.

"Even though asthma is the one of the most common causes of death in childhood, the warning sirens seem to be silent," said Dr Ranbir.

And even though all signs point to a potential health catastrophe, very little is being

done by health organisations worldwide to highlight the problem.

"Sadly, allergy is still not accorded the attention and priority that it needs," said Dr Ranbir, adding that perhaps it was because allergy seldom kills or maims, but it does affect a patient's quality of life.

With allergic diseases becoming a global epidemic, to assimilate rapid advances in this field has become imperative, said Dr Ranbir.

To that end WHO formed the Global Alliance Against Allergic Disease, which MSAI is a part of, five years ago to raise awareness of the threat allergy poses.

"We hope the joint effort will translate into action resulting in increasing awareness towards the prevention of allergy."

At the congress, attended by 4,500 doctors from all over the world, Dr Ranbir presented a lecture entitled *The Asian Allergy Crisis* in his capacity as associate professor in the Universiti Putra Malaysia medical faculty.

Assoc Prof Jessie De Bruyen from University Malaya Medical Centre also spoke on the *Emerging Societies of Allergy* in Asia and how asthma affects developing societies.

Dr Ho Tze Ming from the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) Acarology (the study of mites and ticks) Department, ran a workshop on one of the most important allergens in Malaysia — the house dust mite.

MSAI was formed, based on a WHO charter, nine years ago to combat allergy, and to provide better patient care and quality of life to sufferers and their families in Malaysia.