

# 'Test genome for new subvariants'

## Incoming travellers must also provide PCR test results, say experts

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**PETALING JAYA:** Conduct genome testing for new subvariants and ask incoming travellers to provide PCR test results, say medical experts.

Prof Dr Moy Foong Ming, from Universiti Malaya's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, applauds the government's move to tighten border screening requirements, saying the government should consider requiring travellers to provide negative PCR tests conducted at least two days prior to departure and prove that they are fully vaccinated.

"The requirements should be

imposed on those coming from countries with a surge in cases because there is a higher probability of them being positive," she said.

She was commenting on China, which is experiencing a massive wave of Covid-19 infections that has yet to peak.

Earlier, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim announced the tightening of Malaysia's border entry for visitors.

He said that every inbound traveller would be monitored, particularly those coming from countries with high infection rates, including China and the United States.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's public health expert Prof Dr Sharifa

Ezat Wan Puteh believes that genome testing for new subvariants is needed given that the current vaccines might not protect us well against some variants.

"We need to know if new genomes are coming in and if they are listed as variants of concern (VOC), variants of interest and others.

"Some may be more virulent, and the current vaccines may not be able to provide good protection against new VOC," she added.

She welcomes the government's announcement to tighten border screening requirements, adding that Malaysians should not dismiss the risk of infection brought in by these tourists as it could place addi-

tional strains on the country's already overburdened healthcare system.

"I'm also sceptical about the current herd immunity of the Malaysian population as many experts have said the new variants can evade detection, meaning you can get infected without knowing it and most people may be asymptomatic.

"I don't think our healthcare system can take the extra load as even now we are struggling with demand," she added.

Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman hopes the government would also expedite a genome population study.

The study will provide authorities with vital information which, among others, allows for better prevention and treatment for future possible emerging and re-emergence of infectious diseases, particularly those that are responsible for major outbreaks.

"It also allows us to prepare for new emerging strains and responses to the vaccine.

"Knowing the human genome and related scientific knowledge will allow us to study in detail the response towards antibodies production and other inflammatory response, and to identify gene that is associated with severe allergic reactions," said Dr Malina.