

Reintroducing SOP in schools will depend on several factors

PETALING JAYA: With the shadow of a Covid-19 wave on the mind of most people, health experts say any reintroduction of previous Covid-19 standard operating procedure (SOP) in schools will depend on more than just an overall upward trend of cases.

They said the number of hospitalisations or deaths nationwide due to Covid-19 would influence whether previous policies in schools, such as mask wearing, would be reinstated, with students still encouraged to keep their masks on.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's consultant clinical microbiologist Prof Dr Zamberi Sekawi said any measures to reintroduce masking up at

schools would depend on the increase in the number of Covid-19 related hospitalisations or deaths.

"If the need arises, mask wearing should not be specific to just schools but all places where there is a high-risk of transmission.

"Wearing a mask (in schools) should similarly be done through a risk-based approach, where children, teachers or staff exhibiting symptoms should wear a mask.

"Families whose members are experiencing respiratory illness-like symptoms should also perform Covid-19 self-tests and obtain a negative (test) result before going about their routines, which for some includes going to schools," he

said yesterday.

Preventing the transmission of Covid-19, Dr Zamberi said, would require more than just mask wearing but also practising good personal hygiene such washing hands regularly and sanitising.

"Practising good cough etiquette and physical distancing are also needed to prevent transmissions.

"At the same time, parents whose children have immunocompromised health conditions should vaccinate their children to mitigate severe symptoms (if the children contract the virus)," said Dr Zamberi, who is the Malaysian Society of Infectious Diseases and Chemotherapy president.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia public health expert Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh proposed that Covid-19 tests be made available in schools.

"At the very least, Covid-19 self-tests should be made available (in schools).

"Students in the high-risk category, such as the sickly or handicapped, who have not completed vaccinations should be isolated and monitored in hospitals if they show symptoms," she said.

Dr Sharifa added that the risk of children developing severe symptoms are also low, as most would likely develop mild symptoms or even be asymptomatic, citing the

"Risk Factors for Severe Covid-19 in Children" medical journal published earlier this month.

"The risk of children getting severe symptoms, however, increases if they have comorbidities such as pre-existing obesity, the presence of cardiovascular and respiratory disease, or even those with type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

"This may increase the risk of those infected to succumb due to complications (after being infected)," she said.

Dr Sharifa said adults are highly encouraged to protect their children with vaccinations while also taking other measures to prevent transmission to children.