

Society's bold pledge

Allergy awareness survey launched as part of initiative to manage prevention, improve quality of life

IN MALAYSIA, it is estimated that as many as four out of five children are at risk of developing allergies when both parents have a pre-existing allergy.

To address this public health concern, the Malaysian Society of Allergy and Immunology (MSAI) has embarked on a nationwide Allergy-Free Nation initiative that seeks to change the allergy landscape in Malaysia and addresses how allergies are both identified and diagnosed.

Present at the launch were MSAI president Dr Amir Hamzah Abdul Latiff and Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Paediatrics Department head Assoc Prof Dr

Intan Hakimah Ismail, who signed a memorandum of understanding to signal their joint collaboration on the MSAI Malaysian Allergy Awareness Survey.

The survey is the first of its kind in Malaysia and phase one of the Allergy-Free Nation initiative.

Dr Amir explained the current allergy predicament in Malaysia, where despite the high prevalence of allergic diseases, potential research breakthroughs were hampered by lack of data to determine the level of public awareness.

"An allergy-free nation is a bold pledge but one which MSAI strongly believes is achievable once we have a better understanding of Malaysians and their relationship with allergies," he said.

Dr Intan, who is the survey's lead investigator, said: "The results will enable us to share best practices with fellow healthcare professionals and execute public outreach programmes that help to bridge the education gap on allergic diseases."

The survey aims to collect over 10,000 respondents, both male and female between the ages of 22

and 40 years.

The survey is under way at more than 250 obstetric and gynaecological and paediatric clinics across Malaysia, 40 child enrichment centres in the Klang Valley and now available online via the MSAI website.

The results are expected to be announced by MSAI during World Allergy Week from April 4 to 10.

Globally, more than 300 million people suffer from a form of allergy.

According to the World Health Organisation, asthma is the most common chronic childhood allergy, with seven million children affected by this debilitating disease.

In Asia alone, the prevalence of allergic disease has increased significantly over the last decade, with asthma cases rising from 0.8% to 29.1% and allergic rhinitis rising from 5% to a staggering 45% during the same period.

"What may have begun as a self-defence mechanism for the immune system against infection is now ironically responsible for one of the most common childhood diseases, which significantly affects a



Dr Intan (left) and Dr Amir launching the Allergy-Free Nation programme and the survey. With them are the two children who starred in the Allergy-Free Nation public service announcement video.

person's quality of life," said Dr. Amir.

"The second phase is for MSAI to develop a Malaysian Allergy Roadmap.

"The roadmap will empower MSAI, UPM and healthcare professionals to reduce healthcare costs associated with allergy management and develop specialised pro-

grammes within their own community to manage allergy prevention and improve the quality of life of hundreds of thousands of Malaysians," concluded Dr Amir.

Take the first step in helping to build an Allergy-Free Nation by completing the survey.

For details, go to www.AllergyFreeNation.com