

Varsities hold virtual lessons

Face-to-face teaching suspended temporarily to limit spread of virus

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PETALING JAYA: Public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia are seeking to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus by suspending face-to-face teaching activities temporarily.

In an internal circular to academic staff, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) deputy vice-chancellor (academic and international) Prof Dr M. Iqbal Saripan said lecturers are allowed to conduct blended learning replacement mode (Mod Pembelajaran Teradun Gantian) for the first two weeks of the semester, starting today till Feb 21.

"Lecturers are allowed to carry out classes virtually or postpone classes for the first two weeks of the academic calendar.

"International students who have travelled back to their homeland during the semester break are

allowed to miss the first two weeks of classes, while new students or students who've returned from overseas are required to conduct home surveillance (for symptoms)," said the circular seen by *The Star*.

When contacted, UPM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Aini Ideris confirmed the suspension of face-to-face lessons, while Prof Iqbal said that steps are being taken to ensure students' safety.

"New and returning students from all countries can still register with us. Registration has opened since last week.

"We will provide medical screening facilities to students upon registration," said Prof Iqbal.

In an email to academic staff, Universiti Malaya (UM) deputy vice-chancellor (academic and international) Prof Dr Kamila Ghazali said the university would be conducting "non face-to-face learning activities" starting Feb 17,

which is the first week of the new semester.

"Taking into consideration the latest development in the outbreak, the university management has decided that all face-to-face teaching and learning activities (lectures, tutorials and labs) will be replaced with non face-to-face teaching and learning activities from Feb 17 to 23. Lectures will continue as usual on Feb 24," said the email.

Lecturers were also told to upload all learning materials scheduled for the week in question to UM's online learning platform - Spectrum - by Feb 17.

UM has also postponed the check-in of students at its dormitories, which was originally scheduled for Feb 15 and 16.

A check with UM's academic and non-academic staff confirmed the announcement.

"Only students do not need to

come to campus.

"But lecturers and other staff still need to work as usual," said a UM employee who declined to be named.

The Health Ministry had sent a letter dated Feb 2 to the Education Ministry.

A source said the letter was addressed to the Education Ministry so that it can take further action as and when necessary.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Mohd Hamdi Abd Shukor said the university would not be suspending classes and plans to follow the "normal schedule" that was announced to its students.

However, Prof Hamdi said: "If there is a need to suspend classes, we will switch to online teaching which is readily available and well-equipped at UKM. We will follow the Health Ministry's advice religiously."