

# 'Safe disposal of masks vital to curb virus'

**PETALING JAYA:** Handling discarded face masks, which might have been used by those with Covid-19, could potentially worsen the pandemic, experts warned.

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Assoc Prof Dr Ali H. Jawad noted that there were no proper facilities for the public for the disposal of used face masks, and this was a problem.

"Face masks can be used to prevent the spread of diseases but improper handling and disposal of them may cause more harm than good," said Prof Ali of UiTM's school of Chemistry and Environment.

As for the environmental impact of the masks, he said, their biodegradability depends on the material.

"Some face masks are made of cotton or natural polymers which are biodegradable while others are made from synthetic chemicals," he added.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians' Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said that handling a contaminated face mask could spread the virus.

He, however, noted that it was only a

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**Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman**

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“very small possibility” a rubbish collector could catch the virus if proper care was not taken.

Dr Zainal advised the public to dispose of used face masks in a closed container.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist and biostatistician Assoc Prof Dr

Malina Osman said a used face mask should be wrapped in a small paper or plastic bag before being put in a bin.

“Indiscriminate disposal would lead to environmental pollution and unhygienic outcomes if the used face mask is heavily contaminated with nasal or mouth secretions,” she said.

Dr Malina believed that due to Malaysia's hot temperature and high humidity, the viability of the virus on a contaminated face mask was only for “a few hours”.

“The micro-organisms on the contaminated mask are usually not viable after hours of exposure due to the unsuitable environment. In general, the probability is low,” she said.

Universiti Malaya Department of Social and Preventive Medicine's (Faculty of Medicine) Prof Dr Moy Foong Ming said that face masks thrown into the sea or river would break down into micro-plastic and enter into the food chain.

“If we happened to eat seafood from the contaminated sea or river, it would have a devastating effect on our health,” she added.