

'Cases to rise due to more testing'

Experts: Everyone must play their role and strictly adhere to the SOP

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PETALING JAYA: Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said that the number of cases were expected to rise due to active public health measures being taken, which included community surveillance, close contact tracing and pre-surgery screening.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist and biostatistician Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman concurred, adding that provided there were no new clusters, the numbers would decline once the testing exercises were completed.

"In my opinion, it will take at least two months for the cases to decrease provided everyone complies with the standard operating procedure (SOP) and we face no problems in regards to personal protective equipment (PPE)," she said when contacted.

As for the alarming rise of cases in Sabah and the peninsula stemming from people who had travel history to the state, Dr Malina said improvements to the SOP could be done.

"We have suggested closing the border since two weeks back.

"We suggested too that those who came back from Sabah should be quarantined for at least 14 days regardless of the result of the first screening test.

"They should also be quarantined

at the designated centres and not home-quarantined, like what is happening now," she said.

Dr Noor Hisham had said that from Sept 20 until Oct 11, there were a total of 353 Covid-19 cases in the peninsula from people who had travel history to Sabah.

There had also been cases reported of people being infected by family members or relatives who were on home quarantine after returning from Sabah.

However, as the country faces the third wave of Covid-19, Dr Malina is of the view that the recipe to curb and control infections has not changed from the beginning at all.

Among the measures that would determine whether Malaysia was successful in riding the third wave included public acceptance and compliance with SOP and all preventive measures, she said.

"We also need clear and consistent instructions related to SOP as well as strict enforcement of all measures related to the movement control order (MCO).

"Excellent examples must be shown by local leaders and community participation through voluntary works from non-governmental organisations," she added.

Universiti Malaya virologist Prof Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar said the number of cases would eventually reach saturation and plateau "once all those who are to be infected has been infected".

He said it was just a matter of how fast we could reach that point.

"I have no doubt that the Health Ministry will be reporting more cases, as results from the testing are obtained," he added.

As for the alarming rise of cases in Sabah after the Sept 26 state elections, Prof Sazaly said the real issue was the actual infection rate in the community even before the elections.

"Most likely it has been in the community even before the elections.

"We need to do molecular typing of the viruses recovered from the patients to determine the situation."

He said that once the government had successfully stopped the transmission from Sabah, the focus should be to tackle the sporadic cases in the peninsula.

"Prevention of large outbreaks among those living in closed and confined spaces such as prisons, barracks and high-density residential communities would drastically reduce the number of cases.

"The government should also advise the public to limit the number of people per gathering to below 25, to reduce chances of transmission considering the probability of two positives per every 250," he said, adding that there should also be emphasis on prevention of workplace transmission.

Prof Sazaly said the Health

Ministry could conduct random sampling for testing in the different localities in the peninsula in order to have a better estimate of the infection rate in the different communities.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah also said that the rising number of Covid-19 cases being logged were expected due to the number of tests being done.

"As we are aware, 80% of the cases with Covid-19 are asymptomatic.

"Hence if we test more people, we will definitely be getting more positive cases," he said.

On Sunday, the Health Ministry also detected 488 new cases in the community in Sabah, with 438 cases not attributed to any clusters there.

Dr Raj Kumar said in reality, not everyone with influenza-like illnesses (ILI) were being screened for Covid-19 and that many were still visiting their family doctors to get treated for fever, flu, cough and sore throats.

"This puts a risk on the doctors and the communities they live in but it is just not practical to send everyone with ILI to the hospital to be screened."

As such, he reiterated the importance of following the SOP.

He said cases in Sabah would decrease if the government

enforced the SOP strictly without fear or favour.

"The community should also play their roles and not take things lightly.

"We will be successful if every Malaysian plays their role, including the leaders," he added.

Dr Raj Kumar said that based on the high number of daily cases, the country was no longer in the recovery MCO mode.

"I would call it the resurgence MCO," he said.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Prof Datuk Dr M. Subramaniam said that although daily numbers were rising and causing public anxiety, increasing testing was still the right way to go.

"I believe that the current triple digit numbers will go down once the screenings are completed in the red zones such as Sabah."

However, he concurred that the country was no longer in recovery mode and that it would be more appropriate to say that Malaysia was in the midst of a Covid-19 resurgence phase.

"The way to flatten the curve remains the same here and for the rest of the world.

"We need to practise social distancing, wear a mask and look after our cleanliness by washing our hands.

"Cases will rise if we relax and are complacent," he cautioned.