

# Stay home to stay safe, health experts urge M'sians

**PETALING JAYA:** Health experts say the current Covid-19 situation in the country is not favourable for social gatherings even for welcoming the New Year.

"Current active cases have exceeded 21,000 and daily numbers are close to 2,000. We should not expose ourselves to any risk of infection," said Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman.

"We should also not strain our healthcare system further."

The conditional movement control order (MCO) was eased for the sake of the country's economy, and

not for engaging in big social crowds or family gatherings, said Dr Malina.

She advised the public to continue to comply with SOP, as the vaccine was yet to be made available locally.

"Hopefully the vaccine will reach our country soon. Singapore has started the vaccination for their frontliners today (yesterday) and their cases are much lower compared to us, we have to be more consistent and vigilant against Covid-19.

"Or we can expect early next year to be markedly different from our

neighbouring country," she said.

Universiti Malaya professor of epidemiology and public health Prof Dr Sanjay Rampal said for the next few weeks, it was important to do two things.

"First, avoid being in congested and confined areas for prolonged durations. It may be hard at times to maintain the minimum 1m physical distancing but we have to.

"Second, there may be a need to maintain a social circle for long-term emotional and psychosocial support, but avoid a large bubble, and restrict mixing across networks," he said.

For New Year celebrations, Dr Sanjay suggested that the public usher in the New Year by staying at home.

Large gatherings, if any, should be held in big, open spaces while practising physical distancing, he said, adding that the location should have sufficient amenities to promote good sanitation and hygiene.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah concurred that celebrations should be held in open areas with good ventilation to reduce the probability of getting infected.

Dr Raj said air conditioned and closed spaces without good ventilation posed a risk to people.

"Malaysians can celebrate in open areas by observing the SOP laid out by the Health Ministry. Use your face mask, observe social distancing, and wash and sanitise your hands regularly," he said.

Going into the new year, Dr Raj believed there would not be "total freedom".

"There will still be restrictions for the whole of next year. Hopefully, the vaccine can ease that for us. However, let's remain positive and hope for the best," he said.