

COVID-19 CASES TOTAL 370,528 (UP TO APRIL 16) NEW 2,551 RECOVERED 350,563 DEATHS 1,365

NEW STRAITS TIMES ESTABLISHED 1845

PP413/09/2012 (030687) | APRIL 17, 2021 | SATURDAY | RM2.00



PIC BY HAZREEN MOHAMAD

# FOURTH WAVE?

THE nation is already well into its fourth wave of Covid-19 infections which started on April 9, according to expert opinion. With numbers over 2,000 for a second day, an expert is calling for a ban on social activities and more aggressive vaccination drive.

REPORT BY VEENA BABULAL ON PAGE 2

## NEWS / Story of the day

'IMPERATIVE TO EXERCISE CAUTION'

# ALL SIGNS POINT TO 4TH VIRUS WAVE

It may have begun on April 9, when cases spiked from 14,805 to 18,600, says epidemiologist

VEENA BABULAL  
KUALA LUMPUR  
news@nst.com.my

ALL indications suggest that the dreaded fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which the authorities have predicted to hit Malaysia soon, is already here.

With new Covid-19 cases rising to more than 2,000 for two days in a row, experts believe that the fourth wave could be well underway and it was critical that standard operating procedures (SOP) were complied with to prevent even bigger infection numbers.

Dr Malina Osman, an epidemiologist and associate professor in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), believed that the fourth wave had begun on April 9.

She noted that cases had been on a steady rise since then, jumping from 14,805 to 18,600 cases up to Thursday.

She said it was imperative that the authorities and the public exercise caution now and based on

statistics, the "wave had only just begun". Dr Malina attributed the rise in cases to the increasing number of educational institutions and workplace clusters that overlapped with the March-end school holidays.

The holidays, she said, also triggered an increase in public movement and social gatherings through inter-district travel, weddings and shopping mall excursions.

"We cannot let our country go the way of India, Brazil and some European nations, which are now struggling with worse waves of Covid-19 infections than what they experienced before."

"India recently recorded more than 200,000 new cases in a single day on Thursday. Malaysia does not have the resources to handle this," she told the *New Straits Times*.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba on April 5 had cautioned that statistics were showing a worrying trend, with Malaysia recording a virus reproductive (R) or infectivity rate of more than 1 from April 3.

He had said that the R forecast at the point was about 0.8 and

was concerned that it could rise to 1.2, and would require mitigation efforts outside vaccination.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah had previously on Twitter shared a forecast on how the Covid-19 infectivity rate could be reduced from an R nought of 1.2 to 0.8 if people complied with SOP, a rate which would reduce daily cases to below 1,000 by the end of May.

However, the same forecast showed that non-compliance would result in more than 2,000 cases per day by the middle of next month.

The discovery of several Covid-19 variants in the country, including the superspreaders Nigerian (B.1.525), British (B.1.1.7) and South African (B.1.351) (17 cases) variants, had also become a cause for concern for health authorities.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin had previously issued a warning over Ramadan bazaars, saying that failure to heed the SOP was a matter of grave concern.

Meanwhile, Dr Malina said the government had to intensify health education campaigns that focused on the importance of SOP compliance. She said Malaysians had to do away with social gatherings for now.

"In general, most people understand their role in breaking the chain of transmission."

"However, the urge to get together is more intense compared



A policeman checking motorists for their interstate travel permits at the Gombak tol plaza heading towards Kuala Lumpur on Thursday. PIC BY AZUDDIN SAAD

with fear of the consequences of being lax. Some take this chance at work in office pantries and restaurants."

She suggested that for now, all activities involving face mask removal such as dine-ins and social interactions be stopped.

On the rumblings of discontent among the public over the interstate travel ban being in place for Hari Raya Aidilfitri, she said it was something the public had to contend with.

She said getting the numbers to dip to two or three digits in time for Hari Raya in the second week of May was "no longer a possibility".

"There is no way we can allow balik kampung or go on interstate travel now unless we are willing to undergo MCO 3.0 (a third phase of the Movement Control Order)."

Dr Malina said the government could instead target the Raya Haji Aidiladha holidays in mid-July and encourage and incentivise SOP compliance among the public.

The government, she said, also needed a more aggressive vaccination drive under the National Covid-19 Immunisation Plan (NIP). She urged the authorities to be proactive and use public or private hospital data to identify the elderly and those with comorbidities to vaccinate the segment.

"If we do not have enough of an uptake by the end of the month, we might need to look at making it mandatory for this group because the general perception is that the government is slow in terms of giving them their jabs."



People wearing face masks at Kuala Lumpur Sentral yesterday. Malaysia has been recording a virus reproductive (R) or infectivity rate of more than 1 from April 3. PIC BY HAZREEN MOHAMAD