

Need for 'self-regulation'

Experts: Everyone has a role in curbing the spread

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PETALING JAYA: Here's what everybody can do to stop the daily number of Covid-19 cases from spiralling up further.

Health experts are urging the public to practise self-regulated movement restrictions and to avoid going out unnecessarily.

Daily Covid-19 cases have recorded more than 2,000 cases for the past eight days, while the current national infectivity rate (R0) is at 1.13.

Kelantan recorded the highest R0 at 1.45, followed by Kuala Lumpur at 1.27 and Negri Sembilan at 1.23 as of Friday.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said to prevent a further rise in infection, the public should avoid going out and being involved in activities that require a person to be in a situation where they need to take off their masks.

"This is based on our self-assessment as well, and that we should only proceed with the activity if it is clear that it has a very minimal or no risk at all of Covid-19 transmission.

"Self-empowerment is preferable as this will avoid unnecessary stress or problems which most of us had to face in MCO 1.0 and 2.0," she said.

With the rise of clusters in schools, Dr Malina believed that schools should only be closed based on risk assessment and not through a blanket rule.

"Stricter measures on SOP compliance should be done and monitored in all schools. With the combination of proper SOP adherence and vaccination among teachers, I hope this issue will be solved soon," she said.

Dr Malina said work from home



Gentle reminder: Wearing of facemask is mandatory, says an electronic board targeting visitors at The Pavilion, Kuala Lumpur. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

policy should be imposed at workplaces in red zones and with tasks that could be done remotely.

"However, if attendance at the workplace is inevitable, proper adherence and monitoring of the SOP should be observed."

If such measures fail, Dr Malina proposed that targeted MCO be imposed at high-risk zones based on risk assessment.

With targeted movement control and self-discipline, she estimated that daily cases could be reduced to below 2,000 within four to six weeks.

She also expressed hope that the pace of vaccination would be increased further to help deal with the incoming new wave of infection.

"I'm also a bit worried as some countries are now struggling with emerging new variants and rapid transmission on the ground," she said.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar suggested that the Education Ministry rethink its strategy to reduce the number of cases involving the education sector.

"A combination of physical and online classes, as well as alternate sessions should be implemented to reduce the number of cases," he said, adding that blanket closures should be avoided as it would further impact students' education.

Dr Zainal also encouraged companies to tailor working arrangements based on the company's needs as well as for the safety of staff.

"The next three months is very critical as the measures will determine how Covid-19 cases in the country will progress," he said.

Malaysian Medical Association Datuk Dr Subramaniam Muniandy

said the government should put a stop to all mass gatherings due to the rising number of infections.

"The government should also rethink its decision in allowing Ramadan bazaars as there can be increased risk with poor crowd control.

"It would be okay if there is proper crowd control, but this has not been the case for a number of bazaars operating in the country.

"The idea of virtual bazaars or an app-based bazaar is a better option. Safety should remain our highest priority," he said.

Dr Subramaniam also believed that Hari Raya gatherings would increase the risk of infection as it involved close interaction among attendees.

He added that the Health Ministry should set clear guidelines and SOP for Hari Raya visits.

"Sitting down for a meal together with friends or family in a room with insufficient ventilation should be avoided as with the facemasks off, people can be exposed to tiny respiratory droplets in the air when having a conversation.

"Crowds must be avoided and all SOP observed," he said.

Dr Malina said those celebrating Hari Raya might need to have a modest celebration, similar to last year.

"If Hari Raya prayers are allowed in the mosque, similar measures should be observed as what is implemented during terawih prayers," she said.

Dr Zainal suggested that Hari Raya open houses be cancelled as it would cause a spike in community cases.

"Open houses should not be hosted, even by VIPs," he said, adding that there should be a limit on the number of people allowed in a house during Hari Raya visits.