

'Delay school reopening on Sept 1'

Parents and teachers worry over safety of students amid high Covid-19 cases

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PETALING JAYA: With less than three weeks to go before schools reopen, parents and teachers want the Education Ministry to reconsider the Sept 1 reopening date after new daily cases are not showing any sign of declining.

Melaka Action Group for Parents in Education chairman Mak Chee Kin said that with cases escalating due to the deadly Delta variant, parents do not feel safe to allow their children back in school.

"There are already those who are planning not to send their children. If schools are really set to reopen on Sept 1, all exam year students should be vaccinated by next week to help allay their fears.

"Perhaps the vaccination can be done in schools," he said yesterday.

Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said not everyone wants their child vaccinated as some are concerned about the side effects.

She said more worrying are the

teachers who have declined to be vaccinated.

"This must be addressed as teachers cannot be dismissed despite them being a risk to students.

"These teachers must be made to go for weekly swab tests and they must be made to wear face shields and double masks at all times," she said.

National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Harry Tan said it is not wise to reopen schools when cases are on the rise.

"Although more than 30% of the (adult) population have been fully vaccinated, it does not guarantee the safety of lives as the daily deaths are now between 100 and 300.

"We received feedback from parents and teachers who are dissatisfied with the ministry's decision to reopen schools and resume face-to-face lessons on Sept 1," he said in a statement.

Tan added that with only 10 weeks of school left, many parents would choose not to send their children to school. The final school day is on Dec 11.

"Therefore, we plead with the

ministry to give special consideration for the safety and health of students and teachers.

"The ministry must postpone the reopening of schools to a safer date.

"We also hope that the ministry will smoothen the home-based teaching and learning processes by providing fast and affordable Internet access, and free Internet packages to students from low-income families," he added.

Universiti Putra Malaysia consultant clinical microbiologist and Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences dean Prof Dr Zamberi Sekawi said the risk of infection in schools could be minimised through vaccination.

"Look at the data available from other countries and study how effective it has been for the children and teenagers there," he said.

In a Facebook post, Education Minister Datuk Dr Radzi Jidin said that as at Aug 7, a total of 352,649, or 85.41% of teachers nationwide had received their first vaccination shot.

From that, 84,995 or 94.89%, are those who teach exam year classes.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said as of Wednesday night, more than 30,000 Malaysians had signed a petition urging the government to delay the reopening.

He said education experts and academicians, too, have asked the government to be more careful in making this decision.

"To date, more than 11,000 Malaysians have lost their lives, with more than 230,000 active cases detected nationwide.

"We do not want the lives of students and teachers to be at stake after many people in other sectors were infected because they are still required to go out to work," he said in a Facebook post.

Ahmad Zahid said although all teachers would be vaccinated before schools reopen, there were still possibilities of them infecting students as schoolchildren have yet to be vaccinated.

Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun said students must be vaccinated before they return to schools on Sept 1 following the emergence of more viru-

lent variants such as Delta and Lambda.

"I am all for the reopening of schools on Sept 1 but the students must be given vaccinations first.

"I am sure this can be done because I have been told that only those in forms Five and Six and those who will be sitting for exams will be returning for face-to-face lessons first," he said.

SM Sains Tuanku Aishah Rohani Form Five student Sharifah Nur Mirrah Syed Mudzhar has mixed feelings about face-to-face lessons.

While she is worried about the high number of cases, she is also concerned about her studies.

"Having said that, health is my priority.

"I don't mind continuing online classes for a little longer if it is safer for everyone.

"And if the government opens the vaccination initiative for exam year students, I'd be happy to go for it.

"It makes a huge difference and lowers the chance of getting affected," she said, adding that she hopes students would receive their vaccines before Sept 1.