

Rise in cases 'does not indicate an impending wave'

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PETALING JAYA: Despite daily Covid-19 cases breaching the 2,000 mark, experts say there is no reason to worry about a new wave.

They say the new Omicron BA.5 and BA.2.12.1 variants detected in Malaysia have also been observed to cause no damage to the healthcare systems in other countries.

New daily Covid-19 cases surged around 32% during the week, with Thursday's figure at 2,033.

Based on CovidNow data from the Health Ministry, for the six days from June 11-16, a total of 11,647 new daily cases were registered compared with 8,812 cases over the same period from June 4-9.

Prof Dr Moy Foong Ming from Universiti Malaya's Social and Preventive Medicine Department in the Faculty of Medicine, said the increase was still small, fluctuating between 1,500 and 2,500 cases daily.

"This trend does not indicate an impending wave, with no observed increases in hospital admissions on the seven-day average, including intensive care unit usage alongside ventilation utilisation and deaths.

"In addition, the positivity rate of Covid-19 infections is still below 5% which is a good sign," she said

when contacted.

Dr Moy however said there was still a high risk of infections for those in the five to 11 age group given the latest numbers showing 48.9% of them having received one dose and only 35% receiving both, besides the high mobility that comes with the economy's full reopening.

"Despite this, the high rates of both adolescents and adults being fully vaccinated may offer a partial, if not full, shield of protection.

"Similarly, close monitoring and swift action should be taken by parents, teachers and authorities on either Covid-19 infections or the spreading of hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) to control them," she said, adding that maintaining good personal hygiene and wearing a mask in enclosed and crowded areas would effectively prevent a new wave.

Commenting on the BA.5 and BA.2.12.1 variants, Dr Moy said there was a possibility of them causing breakthrough infections or reinfections, but it would not be too worrying if symptoms continued to remain mild with no increasing burden on the healthcare system.

Dr Moy also noted that drastic measures to curb potential out-

breaks should only be taken upon the emergence of new variants that are found to be more transmissible and lethal.

Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman concurred, saying that the increasing number of daily cases was not significant.

"Although the number of new and active cases did increase slightly, it seems to have plateaued over the past two weeks.

"At the same time, the country's vaccination coverage also makes it less likely for the healthcare system to be affected, as was experienced during the Delta wave," she said.

On the detection of the Omicron BA.5 and BA.2.12.1 variants in Malaysia, Dr Malina said continuous monitoring was needed, but noted that there was still no evidence of the variants causing severe infection.

"Those who have yet to complete their vaccinations or booster doses should do so.

"Those who have been highly recommended for a second booster dose should also receive it voluntarily," she said.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia health economics, hospital and health management expert Prof Dr

Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh said the increasing number of cases was expected due to relaxed standard operating procedure.

"But it will hopefully not be a blow to our healthcare systems given our vaccination and booster coverage.

"Globally, the virus can also evolve with future variants potentially proving to be more transmissible, but what's important is to monitor their virulence as it can manifest in more dangerous symptoms among those infected," she said.

She agreed with Dr Moy that although the vaccination coverage of those aged between five and 11 was relatively low, the vaccination rates for the rest of the population provided sufficient protection.

"Given how Covid-19, HFMD and dengue can present similar symptoms, parents should take heed of this and send their children to the nearest medical facility to ensure the right treatment is given," she said.

Dr Sharifa said the current SOP was sufficient with any changes only to be considered if there was an increasing trend of Covid-19 patients in Categories Three, Four and Five alongside increases in hospitalisation and death rates.