

'No fear, campuses are safe'

Universities say steps are in place to curb Covid-19 spread

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PETALING JAYA: Students attending university orientations should not be unduly worried about Covid-19 with the enrolment going back to physical mode after two years, say experts.

As the country is transitioning to the endemic phase, everyone is expected to live with the virus, including university students, said Prof Dr Moy Foong Ming of Universiti Malaya's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine.

Acknowledging the pros and cons of the move, she said a physical mode of orientation would provide better social connection among the students.

"We are aware of the risks of a

full physical orientation.

"However, a hybrid orientation will not provide the same effect for those going online mode. Students feel less connected and not involved with the activities.

"We can't be holding hybrid activities forever, especially as we are moving towards an endemic phase," she said when contacted, adding that universities should put in place clear guidelines.

The risk of infection could be lowered by instantly isolating students who show Covid-19 symptoms, Prof Moy added.

"If all incoming students are fully vaccinated and tested negative before entering the campus, students with flu-like symptoms, even though tested negative, should not join the orientation.

"Face masks should still be worn indoors.

"If these measures are enforced, the risk of infection will be lessened," she said.

Some public and private universities will be handling their orientation, typically a one-week programme, physically again as more Covid-19 restrictions for mass gatherings have been lifted.

Over the past two years, universities have been exploring ways of conducting the programme which includes the use of online video platforms and social media.

Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said with the vaccines and current recommended standard operating procedure (SOP), there should be no problem for face to

face methods.

"I think they should proceed with face to face learning methods. Online or hybrid can be reserved for other technical purposes.

"The situation now is safe for physical activities provided the students comply with the recommended SOP and are vaccinated," she said.

Dr Malina also called for the community to be empowered when it comes to practicing public health advice while avoiding unnecessary worries pertaining to the virus.

"We have to understand that vaccines work and compliance with the SOP is important.

"As long as these two are followed strictly, the pattern of risk of infection remains the same," she said.