

Experts: Fine-tune plan to prevent cross-contamination

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HEALTH experts have called on the Selangor government to fine-tune its plan to make the wearing of face masks compulsory for food handlers such as cooks, waiters and hawkers.

Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said premises with proper ventilation should be exempted.

She said food-related infections were usually caused by cross-contamination, and rarely by coughing or sneezing.

Cross-contamination is the transfer of bacteria or other microorganisms from one substance to another and may happen at any stage of food production.

"Microorganisms ejected via coughs or sneezes could cause diarrhoea, but it is rare," she told *StarMetro*.



Prof Moy: Masks should be replaced once they become moist.

Dr Malina, however, said the face mask requirement would help prevent the transfer of saliva and nasal fluids.

"But masks are not 100% effective against viruses and smaller particles," she said.

Prof Dr Moy Foong Ming of



Dr Malina: Masks are not 100% effective against viruses.

Universiti Malaya's Social and Preventive Medicine Department said the chances of rubella and Covid-19 being transmitted via food were low.

"It is far more likely that these viruses spread via airborne routes in the form of droplets from one



Dr Zainal: Microorganisms unlikely to survive on food and drinks.

person to another," she said.

Prof Moy noted that microorganisms causing illnesses such as cholera, typhoid fever and hepatitis A were usually transmitted via fecal-oral routes.

"These are usually caused by poor hygiene such as improper

hand washing, contaminated water and unclean surroundings," she added.

Prof Moy explained that although N95 respirators provide the best protection, surgical and cloth masks could still be used by food handlers.

"However, the masks should be replaced once they become moist," she said, adding that workers should wash their hands after touching their masks.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said the new ruling was good to ensure hygiene in food preparation.

"Face masks also provide some protection against Covid-19, measles, MERS, whooping cough and tuberculosis.

"However, these microorganisms are mostly airborne and likely will not survive on food and drinks," he added.