

AKHBAR : BERITA HARIAN  
MUKA SURAT : 1  
RUANGAN : MUKA HADAPAN

IKASI

# KKM siap siaga hadapi gelombang baharu COVID-19

Susulan gelombang baharu COVID-19 di Singapura yang menyaksikan jangkitan virus berbahaya itu melonjak dua kali ganda, Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) meningkatkan langkah siap siaga bagi menghadapi sebarang kemungkinan.

Oleh Latifah Arifin → *Nasional 5*

Firma penyelidikan kesihatan syor 3 langkah tangani krisis NCD diabetes, hipertensi, kolesterol tinggi dan obesiti

*Nasional 5*



(Foto Sadiq Sami)



AKHBAR : BERITA HARIAN  
MUKA SURAT : 5  
RUANGAN : NASIONAL

# KKM pantau COVID-19 melonjak di Singapura

Malaysia siap siaga susulan peningkatan jangkitan dua kali ganda

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**Kuala Lumpur:** Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) meningkatkan langkah siaga susulan gelombang baharu COVID-19 di Singapura yang menyaksikan jangkitan virus berbahaya itu melonjak dua kali ganda.

Kementerian itu memaklumkan, pihaknya sentiasa memantau situasi COVID-19 di Malaysia dan pada peringkat global.

"Susulan gelombang terbaharu di Singapura, KKM meningkatkan langkah kesiapsiagaan ba-

gi menghadapi kemungkinan peningkatan kes di Malaysia," menurut KKM dalam satu kenyataan, semalam.

Sehingga kini, jelas KKM, varian yang sedang menular di Malaysia masih lagi varian Omicron dan subvariannya, namun ada satu kes KP.2.1 dan satu kes KP.1.1 dilaporkan sejak Mac lalu, kedua-duanya sebahagian keluarga Omicron.

"Ia adalah *sublineage* daripada JN.1.1.1. Pada 3 Mei lalu, Pertubuhan Kesihatan Sedunia (WHO) menyenaraikan KP.2 sebagai Varian Dalam Pemantauan (VUM) dan ia tidak menyebabkan jangkitan teruk kepada individu dijangkiti," menurut KKM.

Sementara itu, Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, berkata KKM meneliti dengan dekat trajektori gelombang baharu peningkatan dua kali ganda kes COVID-19 yang dilaporkan di Singapura.

"Setakat ini, dilaporkan ia membabitkan kes gabungan sub

varian KP.1 dan KP.2. Sub varian itu menyumbang lebih dua pertiga daripada kes COVID-19 di Singapura," katanya menerusi hantaran di platform X, semalam.

Beliau menjawab komen sama ada Malaysia bersedia berdepan gelombang baharu COVID-19 berikutan perkembangan di Singapura.

Bersama komen, dipaparkan hantaran infografik menunjukkan kes COVID-19 di negara jiran itu bagi tempoh 5 hingga 11 Mei lalu melonjak kepada 25,900 berbanding 13,700 kes minggu sebelumnya.

## Tiada kes kematian

Dalam perkembangan berkaitan, KKM memaklumkan, jumlah kes COVID-19 di Malaysia meningkat 14.8 peratus kepada 1,230 kes pada Minggu Epidemiologi ke-20 (ME 20/2024), iaitu bagi tempoh 12 Mei hingga 18 Mei lalu.

Bagaimanapun, tiada kes kematian dilaporkan sejak 25 April lalu sehingga kini, manakala

jumlah kemasukan pesakit ke fasiliti kesihatan pada ME 20/2024 berbanding ME 19/2024, iaitu pengisian katil bukan kritikal, sedikit meningkat.

Namun, ia tidak membebankan kapasiti hospital, iaitu daripada 0.08 peratus kepada 0.10 peratus, manakala pengisian katil unit rawatan rapi (ICU) turun daripada 0.17 peratus kepada 0.04 peratus.

Terdahulu, agensi berita melaporkan, Singapura mencatatkan peningkatan hampir dua kali ganda kes mingguan COVID-19, mendorong Kementerian Kesihatan (MOH) negara itu mengambil langkah memastikan kapasiti mencukupi di hospital awam.

Purata kemasukan ke hospital COVID-19 harian meningkat kepada 250 bagi tempoh 5 hingga 11 Mei berbanding 181 pada minggu sebelumnya, namun purata kes harian dalam rawatan rapi kekal rendah, iaitu tiga kes berbanding dua kes pada minggu sebelumnya.

Setakat ini, dilaporkan ia membabitkan kes gabungan sub varian KP.1 dan KP.2. Sub varian itu menyumbang lebih dua pertiga daripada kes COVID-19 di Singapura.

Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, Menteri Kesihatan



"MOH menjejaki dengan teliti trajektori gelombang ini," kata Kementerian itu seperti dilaporkan portal berita CNA.

Strain KP.1 dan KP.2 yang menyumbang lebih dua pertiga daripada kes di Singapura ketika ini, tergolong dalam kumpulan varian COVID-19 yang digelar saintis sebagai 'FLIRT', berasal daripada varian JN.1 yang tersebar cepat ke seluruh dunia beberapa bulan lalu.

# Malaysia dalam krisis penyakit tidak berjangkit

**Kuala Lumpur:** Malaysia dianggap berada dalam krisis penyakit tidak berjangkit (NCD) susulan penemuan membimbangkan yang mendapati lebih dua juta rakyat hidup dengan diabetes, hipertensi dan kolesterol tinggi.

Menurut firma penyelidikan kesihatan dan dasar awam, The Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy (Galen Centre), Tinjauan Kebangsaan Kesihatan dan Morbiditi (NHMS) 2023 meletakkan Malaysia dengan kadar diabetes tertinggi di Pasifik Barat dan antara tertinggi di dunia.

Ketua Eksekutifnya, Azrul Mohd Khalib, berkata laporan NHMS 2023 menunjukkan lebih dua juta rakyat hidup dengan tiga jenis NCD seperti diabetes, hipertensi dan kolesterol tinggi, manakala setengah juta lagi hidup dengan empat NCD, termasuk obesiti.

"Dijangkakan tujuh juta penduduk dewasa Malaysia yang berumur 18 tahun ke atas akan alami pradiabetes atau menghidap diabetes menjelang tahun depan. Ramai antara mereka tidak akan menjalani saringan dan tidak tahu status diabetes mereka," katanya semalam.

Bagi NHMS 2023, NCD dan Permintaan Jagaan Kesihatan serta Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) Malaysia, tinjauan mendapati lebih setengah juta

atau 2.5 peratus dewasa di Malaysia menghidap empat jenis NCD dan hampir 2.3 juta menghidap tiga jenis NCD.

Laporan itu memperincikan kira-kira 7.5 juta atau 33.3 peratus rakyat Malaysia menghidap kolesterol tinggi, diikuti 6.7 juta atau 29.2 peratus penghidap tekanan darah tinggi dan 3.6 juta atau 15.6 peratus mempunyai penyakit kencing manis.

NHMS 2023 juga mendapati trend berat badan berlebihan dan obesiti dalam kalangan dewasa menunjukkan peningkatan berterusan, melonjak hampir 10 peratus dalam tempoh satu dekad daripada 44.5 peratus pada 2011 kepada 54.4 peratus pada 2023.

Antara faktor utama menyumbang peningkatan kes adalah pengambilan gula secara berlebihan. Kencing manis, tekanan darah tinggi, kolesterol tinggi dan obesiti berisiko tinggi menyebabkan penyakit jantung dan angin ahmar atau strok.

Berikutan itu, Galen Centre mengesyorkan tiga langkah segera diambil kerajaan bagi menangani keadaan itu, membabitkan isu pengambilan gula berlebihan,

premis makanan beroperasi 24 jam dan tabiat merokok.

"Kerajaan boleh mengeluarkan gula daripada senarai barangan yang diwartakan di bawah Akta Kawalan Harga dan Antipencatutan 2011. Kawalan harga gula faktor utama penggunaannya berlebihan dalam makanan."

"Harga gula kekal rendah dan bawah harga siling berikutan insentif kerajaan kepada industri, Malaysia yang bukan negara pengeluar gula menjadi antara negara menjual bahan itu pada harga paling murah sehingga mendorong pengambilan lebih tinggi," kata Azrul.

Katanya, subsidi kerajaan dianggarkan RM500 hingga RM600 juta setiap tahun untuk industri gula, manakala kos rawatan diabetes dan penyakit kardio-renal-metabolik lain seperti penyakit buah pinggang menelan lebih RM3 bilion setiap tahun.

Syor kedua, Galen Centre menyarankan kerajaan melarang premis makanan beroperasi 24 jam walaupun cadangan itu ditentang hebat sebelum ini.

"Semua pihak harus terima hakikat budaya pengambilan makanan di negara ini sebenarnya



Pengambilan gula berlebihan punca peningkatan penyakit diabetes di Malaysia.

memudaratkan, terutama makanan berkali tinggi diambil pada waktu malam seperti nasi kandar, mi goreng dan sebagainya.

"Burger misalnya, kajian menunjukkan pengambilan makanan ini pada waktu malam membawa kepada peningkatan berat badan dua kali ganda atau lebih 500 kalori setiap hari bagi mereka yang menghadkan pengambilan makanan pada waktu siang," katanya.

Gagang gaya hidup tidak aktif, katanya, tidak begitu mengejutkan apabila sekurang-kurangnya separuh penduduk Malaysia alami obesiti atau bakal mengalaminya dengan kos rawatan dan perubatan penyakit kardiovaskular berbilion ringgit setiap tahun.

Beliau turut mencadangkan kerajaan mempertimbang meningkatkan duit eksais ke atas rokok dan produk tembakau yang kekal tidak berubah sejak 2015, selain hadkan nikotin vape kepada dua peratus.

"Ini seiring penguatkuasaan Akta Kawalan Produk Merokok Untuk Kesihatan Awam 2024 (Akta 852) nanti. Kadar cukai eksais dicadangkan 77 sen sebatang atau 61 peratus cukai eksais harga runcit yang boleh jana hasil tambahan RM771.8 juta untuk kerajaan."

"Bersama jangkaan cukai yang diikuti daripada nikotin vape, kedua-dua hasil akan menyumbang sekurang-kurangnya RM1.2 bilion," katanya.



Azrul Mohd Khalib



AKHBAR : HARIAN METRO  
MUKA SURAT : 18  
RUANGAN : LOKAL

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## lokal

**Kuala Lumpur:** Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) sedang meneliti trajektori gelombang baharu Covid-19 berikutan peningkatan dua kali ganda wabak berkenaan direkodkan di Singapura sejak dua minggu lalu.

Menteri Kesihatan Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata, peningkatan kes Covid-19 secara mendadak

## Pantau gelombang baharu Covid-19 di Singapura

di negara jiran itu membabitkan dua sub varian baharu Omicron.

"KKM sedang memantau trajektori gelombang baharu peningkatan dua kali ganda kes Covid-19 yang dilaporkan di Singapura.

"Setakat ini, dilaporkan

ia membabitkan kes gabungan sub varian KP.1 dan KP.2 yang menyumbang lebih dua pertiga daripada kes Covid-19 di Singapura," katanya menerusi satu hantaran di X, semalam.

Dzulkefly memberi penjelasan terbabit sebagai

respons kepada pertanyaan seorang pengguna X yang bertanya sama ada Malaysia bersedia untuk berdepan gelombang baharu Covid-19, sebagaimana yang melanda Singapura.

Pengguna terbabit meninggalkan komen dalam

satu hantaran infografik menunjukkan peningkatan kes di Singapura bagi tempoh 5 hingga 11 Mei lalu dengan jumlah kes baharu melonjak 25,900 kes.

Jumlah itu mencatatkan peningkatan mendadak berbanding 13,700 kes pada

minggu sebelumnya.

Sementara itu, di Malaysia, jumlah kes Covid-19 yang dilaporkan pada 12 hingga 18 Mei lalu adalah 1,230 kes berbanding 1,071 kes pada minggu sebelumnya dengan peningkatan 14.8 peratus.

AKHBAR : HARIAN METRO  
MUKA SURAT : 27  
RUANGAN : GLOBAL

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global

## GELOMBANG BAHARU COVID-19 DI SINGAPURA

# Kes memuncak 2 minggu lagi

Agensi

Singapura

Singapura mengalami gelombang baharu Covid-19, dengan peningkatan kes jangkitan dalam dua minggu lalu, lapor The Straits Times.

Menteri Kesihatan, Ong Ye Kung berkata, gelombang itu akan meningkat dalam dua hingga empat minggu akan datang.

"Kami berada di bahagian permulaan gelombang yang mana ia semakin meningkat."

"Jadi saya katakan gelombang itu akan memuncak dalam dua hingga empat minggu akan datang, yang bermaksud antara pertengahan dan akhir bulan Jun," katanya.

Kementerian Kesihatan berkata, bagi melindungi kapasiti katil hospital dan sebagai langkah berjaga-jaga, hospital awam diminta mengurangkan kes pembedahan elektif tidak mendesak, dan memindahkan pesakit yang sesuai ke kemudahan seperti kemudahan penjagaan peralihan atau pulang ke rumah melalui Penjagaan Pesakit Dalam Bergerak.

MOH berkata, anggaran jumlah kes Covid-19 pada minggu 5 hingga 11 Mei meningkat kepada 25,900 kes, berbanding 13,700 kes pada minggu sebelumnya. Purata kemasukan

Ong juga menggesa mereka yang paling berisiko menghidap penyakit teruk termasuk individu berusia 60 tahun ke atas, individu yang lemah dari segi perubatan dan penduduk kemudahan penjagaan warga emas, untuk menerima dos tambahan vaksin Covid-19, jika belum menerimanya dalam 12 bulan lepas.

MOH berkata, anggaran jumlah kes Covid-19 pada minggu 5 hingga 11 Mei meningkat kepada 25,900 kes, berbanding 13,700 kes pada minggu sebelumnya. Purata kemasukan



MARINA Bay, Singapura. - Foto AFP

harian Covid-19 di hospital meningkat kepada kira-kira 250 daripada 181 minggu sebelumnya. Purata kes Covid-19 di unit rawatan rapi harian (ICU) kekal rendah iaitu tiga kes, berbanding dua kes pada

minggu sebelumnya.

Ong berkata lagi, jika jumlah kes Covid-19 meningkat sekali ganda, Singapura akan mempunyai 500 pesakit dalam sistem penjagaan kesihatannya, yang mana Singapura boleh

kendalikan.

"Bagaimanapun, jika bilangan kes meningkat dua kali ganda untuk kali kedua, akan ada 1,000 pesakit, dan itu akan menjadi beban yang besar kepada sistem hospital," katanya.



AKHBAR : KOSMO  
MUKA SURAT : 6  
RUANGAN : NEGARA



DZULKEFLY menyatakan dua sub varian baharu Omicron punca kes naik mendadak di Singapura.

Kes naik mendadak akibat dua sub varian Omicron

## Kerajaan pantau kes Covid-19 di Singapura

**PETALING JAYA** – Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) sedang meneliti trajektori gelombang baharu Covid-19 susulan peningkatan dua kali ganda pandemik tersebut yang dilaporkan di Singapura.

Menterinya, Datuk Seri Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata, peningkatan kes Covid-19 secara mendadak di negara jiran itu membabitkan dua sub varian baharu Omicron.

Menurutnya, dilaporkan kes gabungan varian KP.1 dan KP.2 menyumbang lebih dua pertiga daripada kes Covid-19 di Singapura.

"Bagi Malaysia pula, laporan angka Covid-19 pada 12 hingga 18 Mei ialah 1,230 berbanding 1,071 kes minggu sebelumnya iaitu

peningkatan 14.8 peratus. Tiada kematian baharu daripada Covid-19 sejak 25 April lalu.

"Mengetahui varian yang beredar, kami telah melaporkan setiap KP 1.1 dan KP.2.1 pada Mac 2024 dengan kedua-duanya gejala ringan dan tidak melaporkan sebarang peningkatan ketara dalam kes Covid-19," katanya pada hantaran X semalam.

Berikutan itu, Dzulkefly berkata, KKM akan terus memantau keadaan serta sistem kesihatan negara selain bersedia untuk sebarang lonjakan kes.

"Orang ramai pula dinasihatkan supaya terus mengekalkan kebersihan diri, mengurangkan interaksi sosial sekiranya tidak

sihat dan memakai pelitup muka jika mereka berada dalam kalangan berisiko tinggi, di tempat ramai orang atau mengalami gejala," katanya.

Dilaporkan angka jangkitan Covid-19 di Singapura bagi tempoh 5 Mei hingga 11 Mei lalu dengan jumlah kes baharu melonjak kepada 25,900.

Jumlah itu mencatatkan peningkatan mendadak berbanding 13,700 kes pada minggu sebelumnya.

Sementara itu, di Malaysia, jumlah kes Covid-19 yang dilaporkan pada 12 hingga 18 Mei lalu adalah 1,230 berbanding 1,071 kes pada minggu sebelumnya dengan peningkatan 14.8 peratus.

AKHBAR : SINAR HARIAN  
MUKA SURAT : 12  
RUANGAN : NASIONAL

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NASIONAL

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# KKM pantau peningkatan Covid-19

Sistem kesihatan bersedia untuk sebarang lonjakan kes

Oleh ROSKHOIRAH YAHYA  
SHAH ALAM



DR DZULKEFLY

**K**ementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) sedang memantau dengan teliti trajektori gelombang peningkatan dua kali ganda kes Covid-19 yang dilaporkan oleh Singapura.

Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata, perkadaran gabungan subvarian KP.1 dan KP.2 pada masa ini menyumbang lebih dua pertiga kes Covid-19 di Singapura.

Menurutnya, di Malaysia, jumlah kes Covid-19 yang dilaporkan pada minggu 12 hingga 18 Mei 2024 ialah sebanyak 1,230, berbanding 1,071 kes pada minggu sebelumnya.

"Ia menunjukkan peningkatan sebanyak 14.8 peratus. Bagaimanapun tiada kematian baharu akibat Covid-19 dilaporkan sejak 25 April 2024.

"Mengenai varian yang kini sedang menular, kami telah melaporkan setiap KP.1.1 dan KP.2.1 pada Mac 2024.

"Kedua-duanya dengan gejala ringan dan tidak melaporkan sebarang peningkatan ketara dalam kes Covid-19.

"Kami akan terus memantau keadaan dan sistem kesihatan bersedia untuk sebarang lonjakan kes," jelasnya.

Tambahnya, orang ramai digalakkan untuk mengambil beberapa langkah pencegahan antaranya mengekalkan kebersihan diri yang baik.

"Selain itu, mengurangkan interaksi sosial apabila berasa tidak sihat dan memakai topeng jika berada dalam kumpulan berisiko tinggi termasuk di kawasan yang sangat sesak, atau apabila ber-gejala," jelasnya.

## Kes Covid-19 naik sekali ganda di Singapura

**SINGAPURA** - Jumlah kes Covid-19 yang dicatatkan di Singapura meningkat hampir sekali ganda dalam tempoh seminggu sehingga mendorong Kementerian Kesihatan (MOH) mengambil beberapa langkah demi memastikan sumber mencukupi di hospital awam di republik tersebut.

Bilangan jangkitan Covid-19 yang dianggarkan pada 5 hingga 11 Mei melonjak kepada 25,900 kes, iaitu kenaikan 90 peratus berbanding 13,700 kes pada minggu sebelumnya.

Menurut MOH, purata kes harian Covid-19 yang dimasukkan ke hospital pula meningkat kepada kira-kira 250 daripada 181 kes pada minggu sebelumnya.

Tambahnya, purata kes harian dalam jagaan rapi masih kekal rendah dengan merekodkan tiga kes jika dibandingkan dengan dua

kes pada minggu sebelumnya.

"MOH sedang memantau dengan teliti perkembangan berikutan gelombang baharu ini.

"Demi menjaga kapasiti katil hospital dan sebagai langkah berjaga-jaga, pusat kesihatan awam digesa mengurangkan kes-kes yang memerlukan pembedahan elektif tidak penting, selain memindahkan pesakit bersesuaian di kemudahan jagaan seperti kemudahan jagaan peralihan atau di rumah," katanya.

Difahamkan dua jenis virus Covid-19 iaitu KP.1 dan KP.2 telah membentuk lebih dua pertiga kes di Singapura pada masa ini.

Dua jenis itu merupakan sebahagian daripada kelompok varian Covid-19 yang dinamakan ahli sains sebagai 'FLIRT', sempena nama teknikal mutasi virus berkenaan. - Agensi



AKHBAR : UTUSAN MALAYSIA  
MUKA SURAT : 1  
RUANGAN : MUKA HADAPAN

## Sah! Bilik bedah Hospital Sultan Idris Shah bermasalah

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**PETALING JAYA:** Sah! Ada masalah teknikal di Kompleks Dewan Bedah Pusat Jantung Hospital Sultan Idris Shah (HSIS), Serdang.

Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri (JKN) Selangor mengesahkan kompleks itu berdepan isu teknikal meliputi masalah bekalan elektrik dan kelembapan tinggi.

**Bersambung di muka 3**

AKHBAR : UTUSAN MALAYSIA  
MUKA SURAT : 3  
RUANGAN : DALAM NEGERI

## Sah! Bilik bedah Hospital Sultan Idris Shah bermasalah

Dari muka 1

Pengarah Kesihatan Selangor, Dr. Umni Kalthom Shamsudin berkata, isu itu sedang ditangani dan diambil tindakan oleh kontraktor utama di bawah pemantauan Jabatan Kerja Raya (JKR) sebelum pengoperasian di Kompleks Dewan Bedah Pusat Jantung HSIS dimulakan.

"Walaupun Kompleks Dewan Bedah Pusat Jantung HSIS belum dapat digunakan, perkhidmatan pembedahan kardiotorasik masih dilaksanakan di Dewan Bedah Kardiotorasik di Bangunan Utama HSIS di samping rujukan pesakit ke Institut

Jantung Negara (IJN).

"Selain perkhidmatan pembedahan kardiotorasik yang ditawarkan di HSIS, Kementerian Kesihatan mengambil inisiatif penyumberluaran pesakit yang memerlukan perkhidmatan rawatan pembedahan kardiotorasik ke fasiliti swasta.

"Inisiatif ini dalam peringkat akhir perancangan dan dijangka dilaksanakan dalam masa terdekat," katanya dalam kenyataan semalam.

Siaran muka hadapan *Utusan Malaysia* Jumaat lalu melaporkan, empat dewan bedah di bangunan baharu Pusat Jantung di HSIS didakwa gagal berfungsi kerana masalah teknikal.

Sumber yang rapat dengan pusat jantung berkenaan mendakwa, kira-kira 1,000 prosedur pembedahan jantung tidak dapat dijalankan susulan masalah tersebut.

Lebih menyedihkan, semua bilik bedah di bangunan lama turut tidak dapat digunakan akibat masalah sama.

Dr. Umni Kalthom berkata, Pusat Jantung HSIS beroperasi secara berfasa bermula 13 Disember 2022 dengan menawarkan perkhidmatan kesihatan melibatkan rawatan pesakit jantung.

Menurut beliau, semua wad umum di Blok Pusat Jantung HSIS beroperasi sepenuhnya

termasuk Unit Rawatan Kritikal (CCU), sehingga kini.

"Diharapkan dengan perkhidmatan pembedahan kardiotorasik di Bangunan Utama HSIS, proses pembaikan Kompleks Dewan Bedah Pusat Jantung HSIS yang sedang dalam pelaksanaan dan inisiatif penyumberluaran mampu mengurangkan masa menunggu pesakit untuk mendapatkan rawatan pembedahan kardiotorasik.

"JKNS akan memantau rapat bagi memastikan tindakan pembaikan Kompleks Dewan Bedah Pusat Jantung HSIS disegerakan demi kelangsungan perkhidmatan," katanya.



AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES  
MUKA SURAT : 5  
RUANGAN : NEWS / NATION

## NEW WAVE

# MINISTRY MONITORING S'PORE COVID SURGE

Sub-variants KP.1 and KP.2 make up half of the cases in the city-state

LUGMAN HAKIM  
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**T**HE Health Ministry is monitoring the recent surge of Covid-19 cases in Singapore as reported by local media.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said the combined proportion of sub-variants KP.1 and KP.2 accounted for more than half of the Covid-19 cases in Singapore.

"The Health Ministry is closely tracking the trajectory of the recent wave of a two-fold increase in Covid-19 cases reported by Singapore."

"Regarding the circulating variants, we've reported each of KP.1 and KP.2.1 in March."

"They both come with mild symptoms. But there's not been



More people seen wearing masks in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY SADIQ SANI

any report of a marked increase in Covid-19 cases.

"We'll continue to monitor the situation and our health system is prepared for any surge in cases," he said in a post on X.

On Saturday, Singapore's *The Straits Times* reported that the country is seeing a new Covid-19 wave, with rising cases of infection in the last two weeks.

It was reported that Singapore Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said they are at the early phase of

the wave. The number of cases is steadily increasing with its peak expected to reach in two to four weeks.

Meanwhile, Dzulkefly said that no Covid-19 deaths have been recorded since April 25 in Malaysia.

"In Malaysia, the reported number of Covid-19 cases in the week of May 12 to 18 was 1,230, compared with 1,071 cases in the previous week (14.8 per cent increase)," he said.

## NEW COVID-19 STRAINS

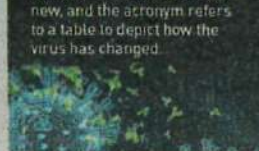
### WHAT IS KP.1?

The KP.1 variant is a descendant of the Omicron lineage.



### WHAT IS KP.2?

It is a sub-variant of KP.1, and it is part of the FLIRT strains of Covid-19. FLIRT strains are new, and the acronym refers to a table to depict how the virus has changed.



### HOW DANGEROUS ARE THESE VARIANTS?

Like the other Omicron sub-variants, they feature mutations that enhance their ability to spread more rapidly than earlier strains.

### WHERE HAVE KP.1 AND KP.2 BEEN TRACED?



### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19, INCLUDING THE NEW STRAINS?



INFORMATION NST

## SUGAR PRICE CONTROL

# Malaysia has a non-communicable diseases health crisis, group warns

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysians are facing a health crisis of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), a report by the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023 says.

The Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy said more than two million people are living with three types of NCDs such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

They welcome the health minister's call for urgent action on sugar consumption to reduce diabetes among the population.

Its chief executive officer, Azrul Mohd Khalib, believes removing sugar from the Price Control and Anti-Profitteering Act 2011 would be a more effective measure to curb diabetes than implementing a sugar content grading system.

He said price controls on sugar contributed significantly to excessive consumption of food.

"The price of sugar is being



Azrul Mohd Khalib

kept artificially low and under the ceiling due to incentive payments made by the government to the sugar industry.

"This resulted in Malaysia, a non-sugar producing country, having among the lowest sugar

prices in the world.

"It does not make sense to go to war against sugar and at the same time subsidising it. These incentive payments should be stopped," he said in a statement yesterday.

With diabetes costing more than RM3 billion annually, alongside other cardio-renal-metabolic diseases such as kidney disease, Azrul said the country cannot afford half measures.

Although a recent proposal to ban 24-hour eateries faced strong opposition, he noted that the food culture in Malaysia, particularly nighttime consumption of high-calorie food, was detrimental to health.

"Studies have shown that eating at night leads to twice as much weight gain, or 500 more calories per day, than those who limit their eating to daytime hours.

"When combined with sedentary lifestyles, it is no surprise that at least half of the population is either obese or heading there."

"The costs of treating the resulting medical conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, are already costing billions each year," he said.

While banning 24-hour eateries might be impractical, Azrul suggested the government impose a 10 per cent midnight surcharge on licensed food establishments between midnight and 6am.

He proposed that the funds collected be allocated for the treatment of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, hypertension and cancer.

On the implementation of the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024, Azrul called for the government to consider increasing the excise duties

on cigarettes and tobacco products, which have remained unchanged since 2015, and to limit nicotine vaping to two per cent.

He suggested an excise tax rate of RM0.77 per stick, equating to 61 per cent of the retail price, which could generate additional tax revenue of RM771.8 million.

"The government must place a hard ceiling on nicotine vape at two per cent to manage addiction and be in line with the practices of other nations. This is not an area where we want to be outstanding."

"It is sobering to note that Malaysia spends an estimated RM16 billion annually treating smoking-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and lung cancer."

"How will we continue to pay for the treatment of these chronic diseases which will last for years and cost billions?" he said.



AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES  
MUKA SURAT : 12  
RUANGAN : LIFE & TIMES

NewStraitsTimes • MONDAY, MAY 20, 2024

12

## LIFE &amp; TIMES



Covid-19 vaccines saved countless lives during the height of the pandemic. PICTURE CREDIT: THACHARDEZ — FREEPIK

Heal

By Meera Murugesan

# 'Serious side effects from Covid-19 vaccines remain rare'

**T**HE benefits of vaccination in preventing Covid-19 far outweigh the risks of rare side effects from vaccination say experts.

Covid-19 vaccine safety is being debated once again given issues related to the AstraZeneca vaccine and its reported rare side effects, which has raised concerns among vaccine recipients.

The risk of serious side effects associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine has been documented but occurrence has been rare, says Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Aziz Abdul Aziz.

The Health Ministry was transparent in providing the public with sufficient information and data on the efficacy, safety and risk of side effects of all Covid-19 vaccines available at that time when we were at the height of the pandemic, she says.

"We believe the government, at that time, had carried out all necessary steps to ensure the vaccines were effective and met our country's safety requirements before it was approved for use."

Moreover, healthcare is highly regulated, adds Dr Azizan.

As part of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for carrying out vaccination, all Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) cases were reported to health authorities via a system to monitor for issues.

"Covid-19 vaccines may have been developed fairly quickly but not without sufficient research. The benefits of the vaccines far outweigh the possible rare side effects when the mortality and morbidity of Covid-19 infection was very high."

Monash University Malaysia Associ-



The benefits of the vaccines far outweigh the possible rare side effects when the mortality and morbidity rates of Covid-19 infection are very high, says Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Aziz Abdul Aziz.

ate Professor (molecular virology) Dr Vinod RMT Balasubramaniam agrees that while the development timeline for Covid-19 vaccines was indeed expedited due to the urgent global need, rigorous safety and efficacy assessments were conducted throughout the vaccine development process.

"Covid-19 vaccines saved countless lives," says Vinod, who is leader of Infection and Immunity Research Strength at the Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Monash University Malaysia.

"I strongly object to the notion that there are conspiracy theories or government cover-ups regarding the safety of these approved vaccines," he adds.

A study published in the journal 'Lancet Infectious Diseases' found that



While the development timeline for Covid-19 vaccines was indeed expedited due to the urgent global need, rigorous safety and efficacy assessments were conducted throughout the vaccine development process, says Monash University Malaysia Associate Professor (molecular virology) Dr Vinod RMT Balasubramaniam.

between Dec 8, 2020, and Dec 8, 2021, vaccinations prevented around 14.4 million Covid-19 deaths in 195 countries and territories.

Vinod says Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), which has been linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine, is an exceptionally rare immunological reaction that leads to clots in certain locations such as the brain and elsewhere.

While the exact mechanism behind TTS is still being studied, researchers believe it involves an immune response triggered by the adenovirus vector used in the vaccine.

Vinod says the AstraZeneca vaccine

uses a weakened version of a common cold virus (adenovirus) to deliver genetic material from the SARS-CoV-2 virus into our cells.

This genetic material instructs cells to produce a protein found on the surface of the coronavirus, stimulating an immune response.

"In some individuals, the adenovirus vector triggers an immune response that leads to the production of antibodies against not only the coronavirus spike protein but also against a protein called platelet factor 4 (PF4), which is involved in blood clotting," explains Vinod.

These antibodies can bind to PF4, causing platelets (cell fragments in the blood that help with clotting) to become activated. This activation leads to the formation of blood clots in various parts of the body, particularly in unusual sites such as the brain (cerebral venous sinus thrombosis) or abdomen.

Additionally, the immune response can lead to a decrease in the number of platelets in the blood (thrombocytopenia). This combination of clot formation and low platelet levels characterises TTS.

"It's important to note that the clotting syndrome is extremely rare, occurring in a small number of individuals who have received the AstraZeneca vaccine," says Vinod.

Nonetheless, healthcare professionals should closely monitor for this potential side effect, especially in individuals with specific risk factors.

In Malaysia, the Health Ministry has announced that it will seek clarification from AstraZeneca regarding its Covid-19 vaccine, which reportedly causes these rare side effects.

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## THE PROCESS

THESE are the general processes that Covid-19 vaccines typically underwent before being authorised for public use worldwide during the pandemic:

**PRECLINICAL STUDIES**  
Before testing in humans, vaccines undergo extensive preclinical studies, which involve laboratory testing and animal studies to evaluate safety and efficacy.

**PHASE 1 CLINICAL TRIALS**  
These trials involve a small number of participants and primarily assess the safety of the vaccine candidate, as well as its ability to generate an immune response.

**PHASE 2 CLINICAL TRIALS**  
In this phase, the vaccine is administered to a larger group of volunteers to further evaluate safety, optimal dosage and immunogenicity.

**PHASE 3 CLINICAL TRIALS**  
Phase 3 trials involve thousands to tens of thousands of participants, and assess both safety and efficacy on a larger scale. Participants are typically randomly assigned to receive either the vaccine or a placebo and researchers monitor them over time to determine if the vaccine prevents Covid-19 infection or reduces the severity of the disease.

**REGULATORY REVIEW**  
After the completion of phase 3 trials, vaccine developers submit data to regulatory agencies, such as the US Food and Drug Administration or the European Medicines Agency, for review. Regulatory agencies independently evaluate the data to ensure that the vaccine meets safety, efficacy and quality standards.

## EMERGENCY USE AUTHORISATION OR FULL APPROVAL

Based on the regulatory review, vaccines may receive emergency use authorisation or full approval for public use. Emergency use authorisation allows for the use of vaccines during public health emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, while full approval signifies that the vaccine has met all regulatory requirements for safety, efficacy and quality.



AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES  
MUKA SURAT : 14  
RUANGAN : LETTERS

## HEALTHCARE REFORMS

## ADDRESS 3 KEY ISSUES



A good system will help the Health Ministry resolve medical manpower issues. FILE PIC

**T**HE Health Ministry can learn from the paediatric fraternity, who virtually solved their manpower distribution with an ingenious data-driven, doctor-to-workload solution, which can be improved, refined and digitalised for other disciplines.

Using artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms, the movement and rotation of doctors can be fairly and promptly resolved.

This Health Information System (HIS) provides the ministry with data-driven forecasts of medical manpower needs so it can better allocate personnel.

The "Sihat Bersama 2030 Concept Note", prepared by the Health Advisory Council to the health minister in November 2019, offers a range of solutions on human resource development that the ministry can refer to.

Here are three priorities that the ministry needs to address:

**DEPLOY AI** to correct the maldistribution of doctors.

The paediatric fraternity's proactive and forward-looking initiative of creating a data-driven model for human resource planning places them at the forefront of solutions for workforce distribution of other specialties.

A team should be recruited to form a ministry Human Resource Planning and Development Task Force. The technology makes available a dashboard that maps the under- or oversupply of doctors in every state, hospital, district hospital, and health centre.

With this, the minister can negotiate with the Public Service Department to stop the random and indiscriminate termination of doctors' contracts.

**HARMONISE** the postgraduate medical education system.

The public arguments among senior doctors on the parallel pathway and the master's programme have jeopardised the trustworthiness of the medical profession.

The Great Parallel Pathway Debate on May 25 is not helping.

Therefore, before the health minister tables in Parliament the amendments to the Medical Act in the June 2024 sitting, I would recommend we allow the "power of the minister within the Medical Act" to instruct the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC) to act on all the proposals of the "Special Committee" to "update the list of recognised medical specialist qualifications and the registration process in the specialist register".

This is based on Section 8 of the Medical Act, which states, "The Minister may, from time to time, issue general directions that are not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act or with any regulations made thereunder and the Council shall implement the directions".

The Special Committee comprises 15 distinguished members of the medical fraternity who are familiar with the complexities, historical perspectives, and legal nuances of the National Specialist Registry (NSR).

The recommendations of this Special Committee will resolve virtually all the pressing issues regarding the two training pathways.

**RECOGNISE** the roles and functions of the Academy of Medicine (AMM) Malaysia.

AMM has contributed much to the medical landscape by pioneering the National Specialist Registry in 1999.

It was launched in 2006. Specialist registration was mandated by the Medical Act in 2013. MMC only came into the picture in 2017.

Since then, AMM has collaborated with the ministry on the parallel pathways for 14 medical specialties with pre-existing memoranda of understanding with royal colleges overseas.

The isolated arguments over one or two surgical specialties must not be allowed to discredit the years of progress and harmonious collaborations between the trainers of the master's programmes and the parallel pathways.

The Health Ministry's top bureaucrat, and by default the president of MMC, must request that AMM continue its function as the secretariat of the NSR.

To be fair to doctors who have gone the extra mile to seek specialisation, registrations for specialists must continue until the internal problems within MMC are resolved.

**DR MUSA MOHD NORDIN**  
Paediatrician  
Kuala Lumpur



AKHBAR : THE STAR  
MUKA SURAT : 3  
RUANGAN : NATION

THE STAR, MONDAY 20 MAY 2024

Nation 3

# Eyes on Singapore's Covid-19 wave

## MOH closely monitoring situation after cases nearly doubled in a week

**PETALING JAYA:** The Health Ministry is closely monitoring the Covid-19 situation in Singapore following an increase in the number of infections in the island state, says Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

"The ministry is tracking the trajectory of the recent wave of a two-fold increase in Covid-19 cases reported by Singapore," he said in an X post yesterday.

He said it was highlighted that the combined proportion of sub-variants KP.1 and KP.2 cur-

rently accounts for over two-thirds of Covid-19 cases in Singapore.

Dzulkefly said Malaysia reported 1,230 cases between May 12 and May 18, an increase of 14.8% from the 1,071 cases reported in the week prior.

"No new deaths from Covid-19 have been reported since April 25," he said.

Singapore reported 25,000 Covid-19 cases in the week of May 5 to May 11, compared with 13,700 cases in the previous week.

Average daily Covid-19 hospitalisations in Singapore saw an increase from 181 to 250.

The KP.1 and KP.2 Covid-19 strains accounted for more than two-thirds of the current caseload in Singapore.

The KP.2 strain was classified as a variant under monitoring by the World Health Organisation earlier this month.

It has also been identified as a dominant strain in the United States and has also been detected in countries like China, Thailand,

India, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry said the occupancy rate of non-critical beds for Covid-19 saw a slight increase from 0.08% to 0.10%, while the intensive care unit bed occupancy rate declined from 0.17% to 0.04%.

"The ministry is continuously monitoring the Covid-19 situation in Malaysia and globally.

"Following the recent wave in Singapore, the ministry has heightened preparedness

measures to address the potential increase in cases in Malaysia," it said.

The variant currently circulating in Malaysia remains the Omicron variant and its sub-variants, the ministry said.

**WATCH THE VIDEO**  
TheStarTV.com





AKHBAR : THE STAR  
MUKA SURAT : 4  
RUANGAN : NATION

# Smokers start before age 18

Study: Over 600% increase in ecigarette users over past 12 years

By RAGANANTHINI  
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**PETALING JAYA:** About 60% of smokers between the ages of 20 and 34 had their first puff before turning 18, according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2023.

The study also found that there had been a 600% increase in the number of ecigarette users in the country over the past 12 years.

It pointed out that the prevalence of ecigarette or vape use among those in the 15-24 age group went up from 1.1% in 2011 to 8.6% last year.

The survey, which was released last week, was conducted by the Health Ministry's Institute for Public Health in collaboration with the World Health Organisation and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Commenting on the findings, Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh, a health economics and public health specialist with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, said educating the public and tightening enforcement are important in reducing vaping and also under-age smoking.

"Smoking is an epidemic in low- to middle-income countries, including Malaysia," she said.

She added that Malaysia's proximity to tobacco-producing countries and its own local industry had also resulted in a high prevalence of tobacco smokers, despite the trend being on the decline.

"Despite powerful tobacco control in the country, which is in accordance with the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, tobacco use has been rampant and at a dangerous level, especially among males above 15 years old in Malaysia."

With the advent of innovative nicotine vaping products, which include heat-not-burn products,



Kick it out: A 'Stop smoking' poster in Kuala Lumpur.

ecigarettes, tobacco pouches and snus, she said these products are introduced as a means to switch to a "lesser" evil and reduce the effects of tobacco combustion, tar and nitrosamines.

Due to the proliferation of illegal smoking products and a lack of proper regulation, vaping liquids may contain prohibited substances such as tetrahydrocannabinol, mushrooms, or even microorganisms, Dr Sharifa Ezat said.

She said this also increases the risk of Vaping Product, Use Associated Lung Injury (EVALI), which is similar to what is seen in the United States.

"Users may not be aware of the nicotine concentrations they are

consuming, as many vape products are not properly labelled. The open vape system and multiple flavours have also been touted as possible causes of early-onset allergies, asthma and 'wet lungs'," she said.

She said Malaysia should have proper guidelines on vaping and stamp out illegal and contraband cigarettes and vaping.

There must also be proper initiatives to assist those wanting to quit smoking, including providing them with Nicotine Replacement Therapy, she said.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) senior education officer NV Subbarow called for a total ban on smoking and vaping in public areas such as restau-

rants, night markets and even bus stops.

"No restaurant should be allowed to sell tobacco products, including cigarettes. There must be higher fines on smokers and restaurants that allow people to smoke on their premises," he said.

Smoking, he said, should only be permitted about half a kilometre away from such places.

Signboards depicting the dangers of smoking must also be displayed at every restaurant, he said.

In addition, Subbarow advocated for the gazettement of non-smoking areas and the prohibition of tobacco product sales in all shops within these areas.

## Serdang Heart Centre to resume cardiothoracic surgeries

**PETALING JAYA:** Cardiothoracic surgeries are expected to resume at the Serdang Heart Centre this year, says Selangor Health director Dr Umuni Kalithom Shamsudin.

The Star reported on May 14 that four operating theatres at the cardiac facility, which was opened less than two years ago, could not be used. It has had numerous maintenance issues, most notably with the air conditioning.

The report also said only one of the operating theatres in the hospital's old building was functioning.

"However, there were some technical issues involving electricity supply and high humidity

at the Sultan Idris Shah Hospital Heart Centre's (Serdang Heart Centre) surgery complex.

"Further action is being taken by the main contractor under the surveillance of the Public Works Department before the complex can begin operations," Dr Umuni Kalithom said yesterday.

She said although the operating theatres at the Serdang Heart Centre were not yet operational, cardiothoracic surgeries are still being conducted in the old hospital wing.

She added that the National Heart Institute (IJN) also received patient referrals.

"Aside from the cardiothoracic surgeries offered at the Sultan Idris Shah Hospital, the Health Ministry has also taken steps to outsource cardiothoracic procedures to private facilities.

"This initiative is in the final stages of planning and is expected to be implemented in the near future," Dr Umuni Kalithom said.

She hoped that the measures taken would help reduce waiting times for patients.

The Selangor Health Department will closely monitor the repairs at the Serdang Heart Centre's Surgery Complex and ensure that the process is exped-

ed for the continuation of service."

Dr Umuni Kalithom said the cardiac facility has been operating in phases since commencing operations on Dec 13, 2022.

To date, all general wards, including the Critical Care Unit at the Serdang Heart Centre, are operational.

The infrastructure issues at the facility had left some 1,000 patients on a waiting list that stretched over several months.

The cardiac facility, which opened in December 2022, is one of Malaysia's primary cardiology centres, receiving referrals from all over the nation.



AKHBAR : THE STAR  
MUKA SURAT : 5  
RUANGAN : NATION

# Drug use up in post-Covid-19 era

## Mental and emotional stress cited as top reasons

By SHERIDAN MAHAVERA  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Drug-filled vape liquids and sex stimulant pills for men are fuelling a rise in substance abuse cases in the post-Covid-19 pandemic era.

According to data from the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK), there were over 145,000 substance abuse cases recorded in 2023, higher than the 142,000 cases reported in 2019, just before the pandemic struck.

Cases of substance abuse during the pandemic years of 2020, 2021 and 2022 saw a drop in cases due to lockdowns which suppressed the sale of illicit drugs.

Volunteers with AADK also revealed that the largest age group with substance abuse problems throughout the 2018 to 2023 period were those aged between 19 and 39, who make up 62% to 69% of all cases.

"Based on our ground survey, one of the main factors fuelling abuse and addiction is mental and emotional stress.

"It could be pressure at university, in the family or at the workplace," said Muhamad Hanafi Jalaludin, a volunteer with AADK.

"We believe that if they can cope with the stress, they would not turn to drugs."

Muhamad Hanafi, who heads the Selangor chapter of Skuad Antidadah, added that their volunteers have been seeing more substance abuse cases among university students and working professionals in the post-pandemic era.

Skuad Antidadah is made up of non-civil servants who sign up as volunteers for AADK and are tasked with organising community programmes to spread awareness about the dangers of substance abuse and how to provide help for addicts.

Aziz Ku Li, head of the Kuantan Skuad Antidadah district chapter, said during programmes with student groups in institutions of higher learning, they would come across youngsters who inadvertently consumed drugs through vape liquids.

"Their peers would offer them new liquids that supposedly helped them to study better," he said.

Aziz, who is also Pahang Skuad Antidadah's deputy chief, said these young people would then become increasingly dependent on these substances when studying, leading to problems with addiction.

"As for those aged 30 to 50, we've seen an increase in men using stimulants to boost their sex drive or performance in bed," he said.

"Often, these pills have not been approved by the authorities and are passed around among friends.

"They try it once and if they experience an improvement, they start using it ... until it becomes an addiction."

Both Muhamad Hanafi and Aziz said their volunteers have to be creative when crafting programmes to spread awareness without intimidating stimulant users and their families.

"If we ... just do an exhibition on the effects of dangerous drugs, no one will show up," Aziz said.

"But if there are side activities such as drawing competitions for children and motorcycle convoys, there will be more participants and youths joining in.

"We even get people who come to us to share their experiences and observations about their friends and family members who may need help."

Muhamad Hanafi, meanwhile, said many of their programmes with community groups – such as clubs and residents' associations – would focus on the importance of people embracing healthy lifestyles and measures to cope with mental and emotional pressure.

"What we are seeing among addicts is that they turn to drugs because they think that's the way to deal with pressure and stress.

"Some of them were given the drugs by friends to help them deal with stress, which resulted in them getting addicted.

"We share with them strategies on how to deal with emotional pressure and lead a healthy lifestyle with meaningful activities," he said.

At the national level, Muhamad Hanafi said the squad aims to register one million volunteers this year to increase its outreach.

So far, a total of 145,812 individuals have signed up as volunteers with AADK nationwide.

"If each family has one volunteer serving the squad, it would go a long way towards spreading awareness about staying away from drugs," he added.

## Substance abuse and addiction statistics 2018-2023

Post-pandemic  
Pandemic  
Pre-pandemic

### 2023

145,526 individuals: Males 95.7% (139,208)

- Largest age group: 19 to 39 – 62.1% (90,520)
- Education level: Secondary school – 64.5% (93,879)
- Most popular type of drug: Amphetamine type stimulants (ATS) such as meth and ecstasy – 71.5%

### 2022

137,176 individuals: Males 95.8% (131,464)

- Largest age group: 19 to 39 – 63.1% (86,567)
- Education level: Secondary school – 61.8% (84,831)
- Most popular type of drug: ATS – 68.2%

### 2021

123,139 individuals: Males 95.7% (117,822)

- Largest age group: 19 to 39 – 65.9% (81,112)
- Education level: Secondary school – 64.2% (79,085)
- Most popular type of drug: ATS – 64.7%

### 2020

128,325 individuals: Males 95.5% (122,561)

- Largest age group: 19 to 39 – 65% (83,401)
- Education level: Secondary school – 59.4% (76,234)
- Most popular type of drug: ATS – 65.2%

### 2019

142,199 individuals: Males 95.5% (135,869)

- Largest age group: 19 to 39 – 68% (96,773)
- Education level: Secondary school – 50.7% (72,151)
- Most popular type of drug: ATS – 64.5%

### 2018

130,788 individuals: Males 95.8% (125,320)

- Largest age group: 19 to 39 – 69.3% (90,660)
- Education level: Secondary school – 49% (64,168)
- Most popular type of drug: ATS – 64.6%

Source: National Anti-Drug Agency

The Star graphics

## Total makeover needed to kick the habit

**PETALING JAYA:** It is time for a total revamp to tackle drug and substance abuse in Malaysia, as the current methods are not bringing down the number of addicts or the damage done to their families, say experts.

Professionals who work to rehabilitate and treat addicts said a necessary core change is for the government and society to stop treating the matter as a national security problem, but as a public health issue.

This means moving agencies, personnel and funds that deal with substance abuse from the Home Ministry to the Health Ministry, which they say has the expertise and mindset required to tackle the problem.

Counselling psychologist and addiction expert Dr Prem Kumar Shanmugam said this includes moving the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK), the primary agency tasked with addressing drug abuse prevention and rehabilitation, which receives about RM300mil in funds per year.

"The Health Ministry can then use its experts to help the AADK, while the private sector can also assist, as we have years of experience in tackling addiction," said Dr Prem Kumar, who founded and runs a chain of rehabilitation facilities.

Jaafar Daud, from Pengasih, a rehabilitation group founded by

## FORMORE:

See page 6

ex-addicts, agreed, saying that AADK should not focus on law enforcement but on treatment and rehabilitation.

"AADK should be placed under the Health Ministry as it has a good track record and the right mindset when it comes to treating at-risk groups," said Jaafar, who is in charge of the Pengasih Selangor branch.

For example, he said detection and treatment of HIV cases have brought down the number of infections.

"This was possible because the Health Ministry worked closely with community groups and NGOs. AADK must adopt this mindset of working with NGOs," said Jaafar.

Similarly, Dr Prem Kumar said addiction is something that requires treatment, adding that the science on substance abuse and addiction has been established for decades but has not been culturally accepted, especially in Asia.

"How and why people get addicted is a combination of genetics, social, psychological and spiritual factors that require treatment," he said.

Dr Prem Kumar also said addic-

tion does not just occur with substances such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines but also with alcohol, caffeine, food, social media, sex, gambling and video games.

"If you see substance abuse as a national threat, then how can you treat it?"

But both Dr Prem Kumar and Jaafar concurred that the unity government's aim of decriminalising possession and abuse is "a step in the right direction".

"If we continue to punish people by throwing them in jail, we won't solve the issue of addiction, as substance abuse in jails is already a problem," said Dr Prem Kumar, adding that these facilities lack the resources and staff to help addicts.

Jaafar described addicts as patients and not criminals.

"They only commit crimes when they don't have money to nurse their addiction. This is their illness. So you need to treat the illness," said Jaafar.

In the long run, society as a whole must consider changing its attitudes towards substance abuse and addiction to align with science and successful past methods, said Dr Prem Kumar.

Instead of taking an abstinence-only approach, he said Malaysians should consider adopting harm reduction or sustainable recovery strategies.

"Good examples are the harm reduction strategies of needle exchanges and methadone substitution for heroin addicts.

"When it was first introduced, the authorities were against the strategy of giving out (sterile) needles to heroin addicts to bring down HIV transmissions among them," he said.

But Dr Prem Kumar said authorities slowly accepted the measure because it succeeded in reducing HIV transmissions among heroin addicts exponentially.

"Heroin addiction in general is also going down because there is an acceptance that they could come forward and get methadone treatment.

"It's not total abstinence. But we will help them stop family violence, reduce crimes and get them a job.

"Along the way, when they realise that so many positive things are happening in their lives, they will stop using. If things around them change for the better, then there is motivation to kick the habit," he added.



AKHBAR : THE STAR  
MUKA SURAT : 14  
RUANGAN : NATION

## Public warned of fake health product ads

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The police have urged the public to exercise caution when purchasing health products online, as there is a growing trend of fraudulent advertisements using images of well-known individuals on social media.

Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department director Comm Datuk Seri Ramli Mohamed Yusoff said the scammers aim to mislead consumers into believing the products were endorsed by the well-known figures. He said the authorities had received a report from a health expert-cum-social media celebrity who claimed his image and company name were used without permission to promote a health product believed to be harmful, Bernama reported.

He urged the public to consult the Health Ministry before purchasing health products online or through social media.

AKHBAR : THE SUN  
MUKA SURAT : 1  
RUANGAN : MUKA HADAPAN



Cars are perpetually double-parked on roads leading to the hospital, hampering traffic flow and causing immense inconvenience. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THE SUN

## No relief yet for hospital parking pains

Severe shortage of bays creates anguish for patients, visitors and staff of Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital in Klang.





AKHBAR : THE SUN  
MUKA SURAT : 3  
RUANGAN : NATIONAL

MONDAY | MAY 20, 2024

NATIONAL 3

# Parking pains upset public, staff at Klang Hospital

► Visitor resorts to arriving before 4am and sleeping in car to overcome problem

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**KLANG:** While the 1,261-bed Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital here may be good for medical treatment, it is a nightmare for patients and visitors who are irked by the severe shortage of parking spaces.

A nurse, who wanted to be known as Izzie, 28, said she was forced to park over 1km away and walk to the hospital whenever she was on duty.

"The hospital keeps expanding, but staff parking is not given enough attention. It's tiring to walk this distance twice a day, and it makes me angry at times. It seems like the hospital is not bothered about staff welfare."

Another staff, who wanted to be known as Mohamad, 41, said parking has been a long-standing issue among them and even though the hospital has added new medical blocks, their complaints have not been addressed.

"It's just as bad for visitors and patients as

there is inadequate parking for them as well. As hospital staff, we sympathise with them, but there is little we can do because we are not the decision-makers."

Factory supervisor Thinakaran Chillyah, 49, whose mother-in-law is ward at the hospital, said parking is almost impossible.

"On my off days, I drive here before 4am and sleep in my car as my wife stays with her mother at the hospital."

"I notice some nurses also coming in at that hour to park and rest in their cars. The hospital has grown over the years, but parking is haphazard in most areas. Some motorists park in front of other cars and leave their phone numbers inside near the windshield."

"Sometimes, they can't be reached when called, causing the motorist, who is blocked, to waste precious time trying to contact them."

Another family member of a patient who wanted to be known as Ong, 54, said he is also fed up with the parking problem at the hospital.

"This has been going on for years. I don't know if anyone cares about our parking issues as it seems to be falling on deaf ears. From what I know, many visitors park their cars at nearby housing estates and even in town before taking a call taxi to the hospital."

The hospital was established at its current location in Jalan Langat in 1985, with just a single block. Over the years, new blocks and

specialist units were added. It is learnt that the hospital has about 1,000 parking spaces for visitors and 800 for staff within its premises.

In 2022, it received a total of 311,291 patients at its specialist outpatient clinics. The number grew exponentially when it recorded 339,803 patients at these clinics in 2023. The hospital received 492,079 outpatients in total the same year.

It is also a referral hospital for 12 health clinics, 12 Klinik Desa, and two community clinics in Klang City, apart from district hospitals in Banting and Shah Alam, and areas such as Kuala Langat and Kuala Selangor, which accounts for the distressing parking woes.

On May 12, *theSun* reached out to the Health Ministry through its corporate communications unit to ask director-general Dr Muhammad Radzi Abu Hassan about the parking situation and the ministry's plans to overcome the issue.

Since it was Sunday, a WhatsApp message was also sent to a senior officer in the unit, drawing her attention to the email and that a reply was required on or before May 15. There was no reply to this message.

On May 15, *theSun* received a call from another officer, requesting more time until May 17 as the ministry was still preparing its answers. However, it has since gone silent with no reply forthcoming till press time.

## Covid cases rise to 1,230: Ministry

**PUTRAJAYA:** The number of Covid-19 cases increased by 14.8% to 1,230 cases in the 20th Epidemiological Week (EW 20/2024) from May 12 to 18, said the Health Ministry.

In a statement yesterday, the ministry said no Covid-19-related fatalities have been recorded since April 25.

On the admission of Covid-19 patients to healthcare facilities during the week, it said the occupancy rate of non-critical beds increased slightly from 0.08% to 0.10%, while the ICU bed occupancy rate decreased from 0.17% to 0.04%.

"The ministry is continuously monitoring the Covid-19 situation in Malaysia and globally. Following the recent wave in Singapore, which saw a twofold increase in cases in the week of May 5 to May 11, the ministry has heightened preparedness measures to address potential increase in cases in Malaysia."

The ministry said the variant currently circulating in Malaysia remained the Omicron variant and its subvariants, adding that there has been one case each of KP.2.1 and KP.1.1 (Singapore's dominant variants) reported since March 2024, both are part of the Omicron family.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said in his post on X yesterday the ministry will continue to monitor the situation. He also reminded the public to maintain good personal hygiene, reduce social interactions and wear masks if in high-risk groups. — Bernama