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## THE RETURN OF POLIO

# 'VACCINATE YOUR KIDS IF YOU LOVE THEM'

You're selfish and anti-social if you do not vaccinate your kids, says polio survivor

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**L**OVE is not love until you prove it. You can do that by getting them vaccinated.

These words to live by are from one of Malaysia's poliomyelitis survivors, Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, 74, who constantly advocates and calls for the public, especially parents, to vaccinate their children.

"Vaccinate your children as a sign of true love. That's also to show you also care for the community."

Dr Sheikh Omar said polio vaccines had long been around and there should be no excuse to not get everyone vaccinated.

"Since the 1950s, you already have oral and injectable vaccines for polio. And the good news is the vaccines are proven to be almost 100 per cent effective!

"With vaccination, there will be more people immunised, and sooner or later, the virus will have nowhere to go and will disappear at some point," he said in a phone interview with the *New Straits Times*.

"This will benefit the family and community. Your children and those of others will not become a supplier or carrier of the virus.



Professor Emeritus  
Datuk Dr Sheikh  
Omar Abdul Rahman

"On the other hand, if your children are not vaccinated, they may get the disease, which may be asymptomatic and hard to detect.

"And before we know it, the infection can start, possibly in school, and the numbers will multiply in no time.

"You are selfish and anti-social if you choose not to vaccinate your children. That shows you don't care about the children and the community. And yet you are living within the community.

"An unvaccinated kid is a walking threat to others. There is always the possibility of 'seeding'.

"You are seeding the community with viruses. And this is why vaccination is very, very important. We want as many people to get vaccinated as possible, so that there are no new virus breakouts.

"Malaysia was declared polio-free in 2000. However, after almost three decades, it is making a comeback following the case in Tuaran, Sabah, where a baby boy tested positive for polio.

"Apparently, in that community, only 10 per cent of the children have been vaccinated. This leaves the other 90 per cent fully susceptible to the virus."

Dr Sheikh Omar said he was not aware that he had polio until he entered Standard 6.

"Polio and the importance of vaccination was not publicised much then because the vaccine was found only in the 1950s.

"One day, I was reading about the disease in an encyclopaedia.

"From there, I sensed that I had the symptoms. A doctor confirmed that I had poliomyelitis. Later on, I was diagnosed with scoliosis.

"It is an abnormality that in-



A child crying after receiving a vaccination jab in Sandakan earlier this year. The polio vaccine was discovered in the 1950s and there should be no excuse to not get vaccinated. FILE PIC

volves wasting of the muscle, where the abnormal limb is shorter than the other. The condition will cause the patient's pelvic bones to tilt.

"My right leg is one inch shorter than my left, and because of that, the vertebrae is bent."

"I have been walking with a

limp since then."

Initially, he said, he always felt sorry about his medical condition, but his mother was a tower of strength.

"She told me every single day to be patient and taught me early on about gratitude and attitude.

"She always told me to be grate-

ful that I was still able to walk.

"And I took her advice and focused on my academic strengths. I was awarded a scholarship to study in Australia after finishing my STPM (Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia).

"And I have not cried since then."

## Sabah baby infected by polio virus from Philippines

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) have confirmed that the type of polio virus contracted by a 3-month-old baby boy in Sabah is the same virus that is spreading in southern Philippines.

This was announced in a joint statement yesterday after a lab test showed that the polio virus was traced to the Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) syndrome that was similar to polio outbreak cases in the Philippines.

Malaysia's WHO representative, Dr Ying-Ru Lo, said the polio case in Sabah was a cause for concern.

"WHO is ready to support the Health Ministry in responding to this outbreak and in ensuring children in Malaysia receive the full protection of polio vaccines."

Malaysia's Unicef representative, Marriane Clark-Hattingh, said priority must be shifted to stop the virus transmission before the outbreak became worse.

"Every child, regardless of their economic status or origin, should be protected against this terrible disease," she said, adding that the only effective way to protect them was through vaccination.

The joint statement said: "The Sabah polio case is genetically linked to the ongoing poliovirus circulation in the southern Philippines, which declared an outbreak of polio on 19 September 2019.

"WHO and Unicef have been providing technical advice on the outbreak response, on-the-ground monitoring and support for risk communication."

The agencies urged parents

and caregivers to ensure children under age 5 were vaccinated as children were most at risk of the deadly disease.

"Polio vaccines are extremely safe and effective, and have resulted in reducing cases of polio globally by over 99 per cent.

"Polio vaccines must be administered multiple times to stop the outbreaks," the statement said.

On Oct 26, the 3-month-old baby developed fever and paralysis, which was later confirmed to be due to poliovirus following lab tests conducted by WHO's Regional Polio Reference Laboratory in Melbourne, Australia, on Dec 6.

Malaysia's last polio case was in 1992 before it was declared polio-free in 2000 together with other Western Pacific region countries.