

Pre-hike health checks mandatory for graded trails

FOLLOWING a string of hiking tragedies and 63 deaths recorded nationwide over the past five years, the government is tightening safety measures by making health screenings and medical fitness certification mandatory for hikers tackling designated trails.

Deputy Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh said Fire and Rescue Department (JBPM) records for 2021 to 2025 also revealed that the deaths were from a total of 1,059 accidents, which also involved 87 injuries.

"Hikers must now undergo an early health screening and obtain a medical certificate confirming they are fit for the grade of trail they intend to attempt."

Syed Ibrahim also said his ministry also enforces the use of certified nature guides, mandatory safety briefings, public awareness programmes for tourism operators and the temporary closure of trails during the monsoon season.

"This commitment is also strengthened through strategic cooperation with the police, JBPM,



Down we go: Search and rescue personnel getting ready to land in a forested area during an operation to locate a missing hiker. — Bernama

the Department of Standards Malaysia, the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry and industry players to keep the country's hiking trails safe and sustainable," said Syed Ibrahim during Question Time yesterday.

"The ministry, through the Peninsular Malaysia Forestry Department and the Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan), views seriously the safety aspects of forest recreation

and climbing activities," he added.

Syed Ibrahim was replying to Datuk Mohd Isam Mohd Isa (BN-Tampin), who asked about the number of accidents and deaths caused by hiking activities over the past five years.

According to Syed Ibrahim, the forestry department with funding from the United Nations Development Programme, had developed a national guideline for mountain risk assessment and

management, or MoGRAM, as the technical reference for cutting risk and managing how many hikers a trail can take at a time.

"Certified forestry mountain guides have also been made compulsory by the department at 189 high-risk hiking areas," he said.

Syed Ibrahim said so far, 2,322 people from local communities, including the Orang Asli, have been trained and certified as guides under a skills development programme, with a role that covers emergency navigation, hiker safety, emergency response and compliance with proper hiking practices.

In protected areas run by Perhilitan, Syed Ibrahim said the ministry has adopted the international ISO 21101 standard for adventure tourism safety.

The standard sets out how risks are managed, how staff are trained, how emergencies are handled and how equipment is maintained. Registration and entry permits at national park offices are used to keep safety records and cap visitor numbers.

Iconic cover: May 18, 2025

A dangerous new trend

By GERARD GIMINO

OVER a decade ago, e-cigarettes, or vapes, arrived in a big way in Malaysia.

The vape industry hailed it as a safer alternative to smoking even without much scientific data on the safety of the devices. It was a second wave of a global trend, producing and selling liquids without regulations.

The *Star's* Deputy Executive Editor Dr Christina Chin was not convinced about the new fad.

As countries around the world and within the region began regulating and even banning e-cigarettes, she and her team started documenting the scenario in Malaysia.

"I noticed many teenagers and even students treating these nicotine delivery devices like trendy, lifestyle gadgets – vaping in malls and public spaces," she said.

Concerned about how it could lead to a rise in smoking, non-communicable diseases and the use of illicit drugs, she wrote a series of in-depth feature and news articles on the topic.

The first series kicked off in June 2015.

"I was writing youth-centric stories that warned how vapes



were increasingly being used to consume illegal substances," said Chin.

Some 11 years after her first package of stories, the concerns have proven true with the use of illegal drugs in e-cigarettes now a serious threat.

On May 18 last year, Chin and *The Star* team produced one of the most comprehensive reports and the findings were shocking.

Etomidate, originally used as an anaesthetic, was being misused recreationally in e-cigarettes.

Other illicit substances were THC, synthetic cannabinoids or opioids.

The Star was also the first media in the country to feature the first and only National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK) school in Kedah which opened in December 2024.

Interviews were held with underaged students undergoing rehabilitation while preparing

for their national level exams.

"This allowed viewers to hear the voices of the victims themselves – allowing them to experience the anguish and regret, through the victim's own words," she said.

It was among the six print exclusive stories published under the multimedia project.

The exclusive reports further featured data from enforcement authorities (the Royal Malaysian Police and AADK), and an addiction medical specialist, among others.

The *Sunday Star* cover that day, with the headline "Dangerous Drugs in Vapes" – a deep dive into the hazardous world of vape addiction – also won silver for the Best Cover Design at the WAN-IFRA Asian Media Awards 2025.

Chin, who has monitored official data on smoking prevalence amid the increasing popularity of e-cigarettes, has since written over 30 stories on the topic.

This ranged from the introduction of e-cigarettes in Malaysia to the passing of the country's first law aimed at regulating tobacco products (Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024).

A year on since that iconic front page last year, the



Malaysian government has made its stance clear.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the Cabinet had discussed the problem of drugs and vaping among schoolchildren.

Government spokesman Datuk Fahmi Fadzil said measures to curb the online sale of prohibited items, including drug-laced vape products, would be laid out.

Sales bans have since been announced across several states, while others are mulling a similar move.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dzulkefly Ahmad has also repeatedly said it was not a matter of if a ban would take place, but when.

Yet six months into 2026, Malaysia's endgame on vaping remains obscured behind a cloud of uncertainty.

As authorities chart the next course of action, *The Star* continues highlighting emerging concerns, amplifying expert voices and documenting the real-world consequences of vaping to ensure the public remains informed about its risks.

BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia has no shortage of food-related policies, yet an expert opined that the absence of a single, legally binding framework continues to leave the country exposed during emergencies — a concern that is becoming harder to ignore as climate disruptions and global supply tensions intensify.

The push for a National Food Security Act by Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu comes amid growing concerns over El Nino-driven droughts, flooding and global food supply disruptions.

Universiti Putra Malaysia agricultural economist Prof Datuk Dr Mad Nasir Shamsudin said Malaysia's food governance architecture is currently spread across multiple policies and agencies, but lacks statutory coordination.

"Malaysia's food security strategy is primarily driven by the National Food Security Policy 2030 and the National Agrofood Policy 2021-2030.

"Thus, Malaysia does not lack food policies. But the main issue is it lacks a legally binding framework that integrates and coordinates them," he told *theSun*.

He said responsibilities are currently distributed across multiple ministries, including the Agriculture and Food Security Ministry, Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry, Health Ministry, Finance

Food Security Act needed to fix crisis loopholes

► Current policy fragmentation leaves nation exposed during emergencies, warns economist

Ministry, state authorities and disaster management agencies.

"In the event of disruptions such as pandemics, export bans, extreme weather events or supply chain shocks, coordination can be slow because no single law mandates how these agencies must act collectively."

Mad Nasir added that the current system relies heavily on administrative mechanisms rather than legal obligations, particularly in data sharing and crisis response.

"There is no statutory requirement for agencies to collect, integrate and share food security intelligence, climate data, production forecasts, import risks or stock levels."

He said a proposed Act would formalise coordination and strengthen crisis preparedness.

He added that repeated global shocks from pandemics, wars and climate events have elevated food security into a national security concern.

"Food security should increasingly be treated as a national security issue alongside defence and energy security."

"Disruptions in food supply can threaten economic stability, social cohesion, public welfare and political stability, as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, export restrictions on staple foods, geopolitical conflicts and climate-related shocks," he said.

Food security, he added, should also be viewed alongside water security as a core pillar of national resilience.

The urgency of reform, he said, is

underscored by Malaysia's exposure to global food shocks, with the country remaining a price taker for several key commodities.

"Malaysia imports large volumes of rice, wheat, beef, dairy products and animal feed ingredients such as corn and soybean meal, limiting its influence over global pricing."

"Malaysia is not completely at the mercy of external suppliers, but for several key food commodities, it is largely a price taker rather than a price maker."

He warned that global shocks such as El Nino events and geopolitical tensions could significantly disrupt feed supply chains, pushing up production costs and consumer prices.

"The country imports virtually all of its grain corn requirements and a substantial proportion of its soybean meal needs, which are key ingredients in livestock and poultry feed."

"Consequently, this will raise feed

costs, increase poultry production expenses, and ultimately contribute to higher food prices for consumers."

On response capacity, Mad Nasir said Malaysia can manage short-term disruptions through buffer stocks and alternative sourcing, but structural weaknesses become more apparent during prolonged crises.

"If a major food-exporting country imposes sudden export restrictions, Malaysia can respond relatively quickly in the initial stages."

"However, the effectiveness depends on the availability of alternative suppliers and the duration of the disruption."

He stressed that a meaningful Act must go beyond policy statements.

"It should establish a comprehensive governance framework, mandate inter-agency coordination and data sharing, and provide legal authority for early warning systems, strategic reserves and emergency response mechanisms."

The dementia warning Malaysia cannot ignore

LETTERS
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THE Dementia Alliance of Malaysia (Damai) is deeply concerned by the latest findings of the Health Ministry's National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) on the prevalence of dementia among older Malaysians.

The survey reveals that 10% of Malaysians aged 60 and above are now living with dementia, marking a significant increase from the 8.5% prevalence of probable dementia recorded in 2018. This upward trend highlights a growing public health challenge that demands urgent attention from policymakers, healthcare providers and society as a whole.

This increase comes despite improvements in other healthy ageing indicators between 2018 and 2025, including lower rates of depression and greater independence in daily living among older Malaysians. These gains show that focused interventions can deliver results.

The rise in dementia prevalence, however, is a stark warning that Malaysia must treat brain health as a national priority.

The rise may partly be attributed to longer life expectancy, with those aged 80 and above making up an increasing proportion of the population. It may also reflect the growing burden of diabetes, hypertension, obesity and high cholesterol, all of which are established risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia.

This underscores the need for stronger

prevention efforts throughout the life course. The Health Ministry's Dementia Action Plan identifies several modifiable risk factors, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol, hearing loss, physical inactivity and depression.

Malaysia already has a comprehensive roadmap in the Dementia Action Plan 2023 to 2030, which sets out priorities ranging from public awareness and healthcare support to research, innovation and improved monitoring. However, implementation of the plan has yet to be backed by dedicated and visible funding in the national budget.

We urge the government to allocate dedicated funding for the implementation of the Dementia Action Plan, with priority given to:

- public awareness and stigma-reduction campaigns to improve understanding of dementia and encourage early help-seeking;
- earlier detection and diagnosis through routine cognitive screening and strengthened primary care pathways;
- risk-reduction programmes targeting diabetes, hypertension, obesity, smoking, hearing loss, physical inactivity and social isolation;
- greater support for families and caregivers, including training, respite care and community-based services;
- expansion of dementia-friendly communities, day-care centres and support services nationwide;
- enhanced training for healthcare and social care professionals in dementia care; and



The rise in dementia prevalence is a stark warning that Malaysia must treat brain health as a national priority.
— AMIRUL SYAFIQ MOHD DIN/THE SUN

➤ improved national data collection and greater investment in research to monitor trends, outcomes and the effectiveness of interventions.

As Malaysia moves towards becoming an aged nation, dementia will place an increasing burden on families, healthcare services, workplaces and the economy. It is not merely a medical condition but also a social, caregiving and development challenge.

The rise in dementia prevalence must serve as a call to action. With timely intervention, the onset of many cases can be delayed and people living with dementia can maintain their dignity and quality of life while families can receive the support they need.

Our organisations stand ready to work with the Health Ministry, policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure that every Malaysian affected by dementia receives the care, respect and support they deserve.

Prof Tan Maw Pin
President
Damai

Alzheimer's Disease Foundation Malaysia
Johor Bahru Alzheimer's Disease Support
Association

Dementia Society Perak
Penang Dementia Association

Kesihatan mental: Intervensi segera bagi pelajar berisiko

Bagi memastikan kebajikan dan keselamatan pelajar terus terpelihara

JOHOR BAHRU - Kementerian Pendidikan (KPM) menyarankan pihak sekolah melaksanakan intervensi segera terhadap pelajar yang dikenal pasti menunjukkan tanda-tanda masalah kesihatan mental bagi memastikan kebajikan dan keselamatan mereka terus terpelihara.

Menteri Pendidikan, Fadhlina Sidek berkata, selain peranan pihak sekolah, ibu bapa juga perlu memberikan sokongan kepada anak masing-masing dalam mendepani isu berkenaan.

"Kita laksanakan intervensi saringan kesihatan mental, kemudian pengupayaan kaunselor-kaunselor sekolah (turut) diberikan perhatian.

"(Jika) ada saja tanda-tanda ini (masalah kesihatan mental), kaunselor sekolah mesti

membuat intervensi dengan segera," katanya dalam sidang akhbar selepas Majlis Pelancaran Inisiatif Perabot Madani dan Program KALVI Madani di Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil Jalan Yahya Awal di sini pada Selasa.

Beliau berkata demikian mengulas isu seorang pelajar perempuan Tingkatan Empat yang meninggal dunia di sebuah sekolah menengah di Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Jumaat lepas.

LAPORAN MUKA DEPAN

Pada Oktober tahun lepas, Fadhlina berkata, KPM menggandakan pelaksanaan Program Saringan Minda Sihat kepada dua kali setahun bagi membolehkan pengesanan awal terhadap pelajar yang menunjukkan tanda-tanda kemurungan atau memerlukan sokongan serta intervensi lanjut.

Sementara itu, beliau berkata, Garis Panduan Pengurusan Sekolah Selamat dan Polisi Perlindungan Murid Sekolah yang diperkenalkan KPM adalah wajib dilaksanakan oleh kesemua pentadbir sekolah tanpa



Fadhlina (empat dari kanan) ketika hadir pada Majlis Pelancaran Inisiatif Perabot Madani dan Program KALVI Madani di Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil Jalan Yahya Awal, Johor Bahru pada Selasa.

sebarang kompromi.

Katanya, usaha itu adalah antara langkah yang dilakukan Kementerian dalam memastikan segala isu terkait dengan keselamatan murid terus diberikan keutamaan.

Pada 12 Jun lepas, Fadhlina dilaporkan

berkata garis panduan berkenaan akan menjadi rujukan semua institusi pendidikan di bawah KPM merangkumi tanggungjawab sekolah, guru serta pihak berkepentingan dalam memastikan kebajikan dan keselamatan murid terpelihara. - *Bernama*

Shah Alam: Selangor bersedia melaksanakan semakan semula program Itizam Selangor Sihat (ISS) bagi memastikan prosedur bantuan kesihatan dipermudahkan dan had bantuan relevan dengan kos dari semasa ke semasa, kata **Exco Kesihatan Awam, Jamaliah Jamaluddin**.

Mengambil contoh bantuan rawatan dialisis katanya, kerajaan negeri sudah meningkatkan bantuan rawatan dialisis daripada RM5,000 kepada RM10,000 bermula tahun 2025 melalui pengintegrasian manfaat daripada Program Bantuan Sihat Selangor (BSS) ke dalam Program ISS.

ISS sedia semak semula bantuan kesihatan

“Kerajaan negeri melalui Jawatankuasa Tetap Kesihatan Awam sentiasa komited memastikan akses kesihatan yang menyeluruh dan berkualiti kepada rakyat, khususnya golongan berpendapatan rendah dan sederhana melalui pelaksanaan ISS.

“Setiap penerima manfaat di bawah ISS akan menerima manfaat kesihatan seperti Rawatan Asas dan Vaksinasi yang berjumlah sehingga RM500 setahun manakala manfaat tambahan iaitu Bantuan Penyakit Kritikal sehingga RM5,000 sekali



“Setiap penerima manfaat di bawah ISS akan menerima manfaat kesihatan”

Jamaliah

tuntutan.

“Begitu juga manfaat Hospitalisasi dengan bantuan sehingga RM10,000 setahun, dan Rawatan Dialisis berjumlah sehingga RM10,000 setahun.

“Berdasarkan kadar manfaat yang disediakan, kerajaan negeri berpandangan bahawa jumlah bantuan yang diberikan adalah setimpal dengan kos rawatan kesihatan semasa,” katanya pada Sidang Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN) Selangor semalam.

Mengulas lanjut katanya, penyediaan tapak dialisis (*Arteriovenous Fistu-*

la atau AVF) adalah salah satu prosedur yang boleh disumber luar dari hospital kerajaan di bawah Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) ke Kemudahan Perkhidmatan Jagaan Kesihatan Swasta (KPJKS) dan Pusat Perubatan Swasta di bawah Hospital Pengajar Universiti (PPS-HPU) yang dinamakan sebagai Hospital Services Outsourcing Program (HSOP) sejak tahun 2024.

“Objektif utama pelaksanaan HSOP untuk mengurangkan masa menunggu pesakit bagi men-

dapatkan rawatan, selain dapat mengurangkan kesesakan di fasiliti KKM.

“Melalui inisiatif ini, pesakit dapat membuat tapak dialisis di Kemudahan Perkhidmatan Jagaan Kesihatan Swasta atau Pusat Perubatan Swasta di bawah Hospital Pengajar Universiti (PPS-HPU) yang telah ditetapkan dengan kadar bayaran serendah RM63 bagi pakej rawatan pesakit daycare berdasarkan kadar caj pada Perintah Fi (Perubatan) 1982 dan Perintah Fi (Perubatan) (Pindaan) 2017,” katanya.