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TELL ME ABOUT:
DR. YLM

Photos: AFP

THERE has been so much in the news lately about the hantavirus outbreak on the cruise ship, which apparently originated from Argentina. Is this virus from South America?

Not exactly. Hantavirus' hosts are wild rodents like rats, mice and voles.

These rodents, when infected, can carry the virus without getting sick themselves.

Humans only contract the virus if they inhale dust that is contaminated by the urine, faeces or saliva of these infected rodents.

Hantavirus was originally identified on two main continents. The first was in Asia.

During the Korean War in the 1950s, over 3,000 United Nations troops fell ill with bleeding and kidney failure.

Everyone was mystified as to the cause.

Eventually, it was discovered that it was a "new" virus that caused those symptoms.

Scientists finally managed to isolate this virus sometime in 1978 – well over 20 years after the original outbreak.

They isolated it from a mouse near the Hantan River of South Korea.

That is why the virus was named hantavirus.

The South Korean strain of hantavirus is known to cause fever, bleeding and kidney failure.

Then, in the 1990s, the virus was discovered to be the cause of an outbreak in the United States.

Apparently, there was a massive increase in the deer mouse population around then, and this caused the wide spread of hantavirus among humans.

This particular American strain is known to cause respiratory problems.

If hantavirus is transmitted from rodents to humans, how did the cruise ship passengers get it? Were there infected rodents aboard?

The Andes strain from South America is the only known version of the hantavirus to transmit from human to human.

A study published in 2021 had found the Andes hantavirus came from Chile and Argentina, and noted that it may be possible this strain could be transmitted from human to human.

The cruise ship incident is not the first case of hantavirus human-to-human transmission.

Oh no! Will hantavirus be another Covid-19?

Infectious disease experts from around the world say hantavirus will not be another Covid-19, so you can rest easy!

The hantavirus is different from the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19.

Unlike the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which spreads easily through airborne respiratory droplets to infect humans, the hantavirus is transmitted mainly through inhaled dust that is contaminated by infected rodent droppings, urine or saliva.

It is true that the Andes strain can pass from human to human, but it is only through very close contact, e.g. frequent hugging,



Personnel in personal protection equipment gather onboard the hantavirus-hit cruise ship MV Hondius in the port of Rotterdam, Netherlands, last week.

How dangerous is the hantavirus?

This rare infection can be potentially fatal, but does not spread that easily.



A scientist collects mice from traps near Ushuaia, Argentina, last week, as part of an effort by Argentinian authorities to determine whether or not hantavirus is present in the city.

Patients tend to develop respiratory symptoms.

Therefore, it is a very dangerous strain.

How can I avoid a hantavirus infection?

The best way is avoidance.

You need to get rid of all types of rodents in your home.

Make sure you seal holes in your house, such as the drain traps.

If you have rats, get rid of them with rat traps or rat bait.

If you are afraid of the Andes strain, be sure to stay away from people who have the symptoms mentioned above.

As the symptoms are similar to those of other viruses and diseases, it is best to just stay away from anyone who is visibly ill.

You also should not share cups, plates or utensils with sick people.

Do not touch or hug them.

Remember, there is no cure for the hantavirus infection.

Only supportive care is available in hospitals, e.g. ventilators if you have breathing difficulties, and dialysis if you have kidney failure.

The virus needs to run its course in your body as your immune system fights it off on its own.

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which the cruise ship people were reportedly doing.

Hantavirus causes severe symptoms, and it is only during this period that an infected person can transmit the Andean strain to another person.

Covid-19 was very hard to detect because you could have no symptoms and still transmit the virus.

Hantavirus also apparently does not mutate quickly, unlike either the SARS-CoV-2 or influenza viruses.

Therefore, it is highly unlikely to cause a widespread pandemic.

How would I know if I get infected with the hantavirus?

It will depend on which strain you are infected with.

If you were infected with the American type, you may start with fever, tiredness, muscle aches, headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea – pretty much like other viral illnesses.

Then 10 days later, you would start having lung issues, such as coughing and shortness of breath.

Your lungs can fill with fluid and literally drown you if you don't seek treatment immediately.

This is known as hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS), and it can be very dangerous.

More than one-third of people who have it could die.

If you get the Korean type, it also starts pretty much the same

way: fever, chills, headache (which can be very bad), abdominal and back pain, and nausea.

Some people also develop face flushing and redness of the eyes.

Then later, you may have internal bleeding, leading to lack of blood flow to the organs in your body, such as your kidneys.

Your kidneys can then go into kidney failure.

Some hantavirus strains cause very severe disease.

Others cause moderate disease.

What about the Andes type of hantavirus infection? Is it closer to the American one or the Korean one?

It is closer to the American version, seeing as how the strain originates from South America.

Tighter vape rules may backfire

■ BY FAIZ RUZMAN
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia risks pushing vape users into the black market if it responds to the recent High Court ruling with overly strict restrictions on vaping and smoke-free nicotine products, a regional tobacco harm-reduction coalition warned yesterday.

It said tighter controls could backfire as cigarettes remain widely available and continue to cause most tobacco-related harm.

The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates (Caphra) said Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines were at a critical policy crossroads as governments across the region weigh tougher measures on vaping and smoke-free nicotine products.

In a statement yesterday, the coalition urged Southeast Asian governments not to adopt what it described as Australia's failed nicotine-control approach, arguing that overly restrictive policies had fuelled illicit trade instead of reducing demand for nicotine products.

Caphra executive coordinator Nancy Loucas said governments must recognise that demand for nicotine would not disappear simply because legal access was restricted.

"When safer legal options are pushed out, illicit markets move in. Southeast Asia should see Australia as a warning, not a model."

Loucas said regulators should not treat cigarettes and lower-risk smoke-free alternatives under the same policy framework, stressing that tobacco-related disease remained overwhelmingly linked to combustible products.

"Combustion remains the main driver of tobacco-related death and disease. Good policy puts the toughest restrictions on cigarettes while strictly regulating lower-risk alternatives for adults."

She added that poorly designed nicotine policies risked strengthening illegal markets instead of improving public health outcomes.

"A bad nicotine policy does not end demand. It simply hands that demand to illegal markets."

The debate over Malaysia's nicotine and vape regulations resurfaced after the High Court ruled on May 15 that the government had acted unlawfully in 2023 when it removed liquid and gel nicotine used in vape products from the Poisons List.

Judge Datuk Aliza Sulaiman ruled that the exemption was irrational and carried out without proper consultation with the Poisons Board, which had unanimously opposed the move.

The court also found that the decision was driven largely by economic considerations following Budget 2023 proposals to impose excise duty on nicotine-containing vape liquids and gels.

Caphra said concerns involving youth vaping, weak enforcement and adulterated products were legitimate, but argued these issues required targeted regulation rather than blanket restrictions.

The coalition also urged governments in the region to base policy decisions on local public health realities instead of adopting what it described as "prohibitionist models" from overseas.

It said governments should avoid regulations that sideline adult consumers while creating space for illegal suppliers to thrive.

Caphra Philippines representative Clarisse Virgino said former smokers who had switched to smoke-free alternatives should not be excluded from policy discussions.

"Adults who have moved away from smoking should not be treated as an afterthought. If governments ignore consumers and over-correct with bans, they risk strengthening illicit trade and protecting cigarettes from competition," she said.

Caphra said tobacco harm reduction should form part of a broader public health strategy aimed at reducing smoking-related diseases rather than condemning all nicotine use outright.

Thyroid cancer: Signs to look out for

➤ Neck lump, hoarse voice, trouble swallowing may seem harmless, but doctors say recognising early hints of trouble can increase chances of survival, recovery

THE thyroid gland may be small, but it plays a vital role in regulating metabolism, energy levels and body temperature. Located at the base of the neck, this butterfly-shaped organ often goes unnoticed until something goes wrong.

One condition that can quietly develop within the gland is thyroid cancer. Often described as a silent disease, it may not cause obvious symptoms in its early stages, making awareness especially important.

According to the *Malaysia National Cancer Registry Report 2017-2021*, thyroid cancer is the eighth most common cancer among women in Malaysia, with an incidence rate of 4.2 per 100,000 population. Women are diagnosed more frequently than men, although the exact reasons remain unclear.

Not all thyroid problems are cancer
The thyroid produces thyroxine, a hormone responsible for regulating the body's metabolism. Excessive hormone production can lead to restlessness and increased energy levels, while insufficient levels may cause fatigue, sluggishness and sensitivity to cold.

However, thyroid cancer is usually

unrelated to thyroid hormone function. Most people diagnosed with thyroid cancer continue to have normal thyroid hormone levels. Instead, the disease typically presents as a growth or nodule within the gland.

One of the most common warning signs is a hard lump in the neck. Other symptoms may include persistent hoarseness, difficulty swallowing or enlarged lymph nodes around the neck area.

Not all thyroid nodules are cancerous. Ultrasound imaging and biopsies are commonly used to determine whether a lump is benign or malignant.

Unlike many other cancers, thyroid cancer is not strongly associated with lifestyle factors such as smoking.

While some hereditary forms exist, family history is only considered a significant risk factor in a small number of cases.

Early detection is improving outcomes
The outlook for thyroid cancer is generally positive, particularly when it is detected early.

Approximately 85% of thyroid cancer cases are papillary or follicular

thyroid cancers, both of which are typically slow-growing and highly treatable.

However, outcomes become less favourable when the disease spreads beyond the thyroid to organs such as the lungs or bones. This highlights the importance of recognising symptoms early and seeking prompt medical evaluation.

Treatment usually begins with surgery

Surgery remains the primary treatment for most thyroid cancer patients. Following the removal of the tumour, doctors assess its characteristics to determine the risk of recurrence and whether additional treatment is necessary.

Patients with higher-risk disease may undergo radioactive iodine therapy. This treatment destroys any remaining thyroid tissue or cancer cells while helping doctors detect cancer that may have spread elsewhere in the body.

For very small tumours measuring less than 1cm, surgery alone may be sufficient.

Although the term "radioactive" may sound concerning, radioactive iodine therapy is generally considered safe and well-tolerated.

Long-term monitoring remains essential

Despite its high survival rates, thyroid cancer can return, sometimes years after initial treatment. Recurrence most commonly occurs in nearby lymph nodes, making regular follow-up appointments an important part of long-term care.



The overlooked, butterfly-shaped thyroid gland sits at the base of the neck.

Many patients also require lifelong thyroid hormone replacement therapy after surgery. These medications replace hormones normally produced by the thyroid and help maintain healthy metabolic function.

For patients diagnosed at an early stage, follow-up visits are typically recommended every six months during the first two years after treatment, followed by annual reviews.

Newer targeted therapies, known as tyrosine kinase inhibitors, have also expanded treatment options for advanced cases that no longer respond to radioactive iodine therapy. These medications can help slow tumour growth and manage metastatic disease, although patients require careful monitoring for potential side effects.

Don't ignore a persistent neck lump
Routine thyroid cancer screening is not currently recommended for the

general population in Malaysia. However, awareness remains one of the most effective tools for early detection.

A persistent lump in the neck, unexplained voice changes or difficulty swallowing should never be ignored. Ultrasounds and blood tests are widely available and can help identify potential problems before they become more serious.

While thyroid cancer often develops slowly, early diagnosis significantly improves treatment success. Paying attention to subtle changes in the body and seeking medical advice when something feels unusual can make a meaningful difference to long-term health outcomes.

This article is contributed by Sunway Medical Centre, Sunway City (SMC) consultant nuclear medicine physician Dr Tan Teik Hin and consultant breast and endocrine surgeon Dr Wong Mei Wan.

Guide to Hantavirus: Rodent-borne disease dangerous but not invincible

RECENT Hantavirus outbreaks reported globally have reignited conversations about emerging infectious diseases, particularly those linked to rodent exposure and environmental contamination.

As urbanisation, climate shifts and human activity continue reshaping rodent habitats, experts warn exposure to contaminated spaces may become an increasing public health concern.

What exactly is Hantavirus?

Hantavirus is a viral infection primarily spread through contact with rodent urine, saliva and droppings.

Unlike Covid-19, most strains are not transmitted from person to person. Instead, infection usually occurs when contaminated "micro-dust" becomes airborne and is inhaled, especially while cleaning enclosed or dusty areas.

This means seemingly harmless activities such as sweeping old storerooms or abandoned buildings could potentially increase exposure risk if rodent contamination is present.

Medical experts stress direct rat bites are not the main source of infection. Instead, the virus is most commonly spread through breathing in contaminated air particles.

Why comparisons with leptospirosis matter

Although Hantavirus and leptospirosis involve rodent exposure, they are very different illnesses.

Leptospirosis is caused by bacteria

and can usually be treated with antibiotics if detected early. Hantavirus, however, is viral in nature and requires entirely different diagnostic methods and management approaches.

This distinction is important because antibiotics do not work against Hantavirus infections.

Experts also caution against the belief that "natural immunity" alone is enough protection.

In severe cases, the infection can progress into Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), a potentially life-threatening respiratory condition.

Symptoms many people may miss

Doctors say early detection remains one of the most important factors in improving recovery outcomes.

Hantavirus infections often begin with symptoms that resemble common viral illnesses, making early recognition difficult.

During the initial phase, patients may experience high fever, severe muscle aches, exhaustion, headaches, dizziness and gastrointestinal discomfort.

One key distinguishing feature is intense muscle pain concentrated around large muscle groups such as the thighs, hips and lower back.

As the illness progresses, symptoms can become significantly more serious.

Patients who develop HPS may suddenly experience persistent coughing, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing due to fluid accumulation in the lungs.



Despite the danger, it is advisable to not panic about Hantavirus. – 123RF/PIC

At this stage, immediate medical treatment becomes critical.

How doctors investigate suspected cases

When patients present with suspicious symptoms, doctors often begin by examining environmental exposure history.

Recent time spent cleaning dusty storerooms, entering abandoned buildings or encountering rodent infestations may become important clues during assessment.

Blood investigations may also reveal warning signs such as low platelet counts, changes in white blood cells and elevated haematocrit levels linked to fluid leakage in the body.

Doctors may then proceed with confirmatory testing using polymerase chain reaction methods

to detect viral genetic material or antibody testing to identify immune responses linked to the infection.

Chest X-rays are also commonly used to identify early signs of fluid buildup in the lungs.

Cleaning mistake that could increase risk

One of the biggest mistakes people make when dealing with rodent droppings is dry sweeping or vacuuming contaminated areas.

Health experts warn these methods can easily disperse viral particles into the air, increasing the likelihood of inhalation.

Instead, doctors recommend using what is known as the "wet method".

This involves spraying affected areas thoroughly with disinfectant or a diluted bleach solution before cleaning.

Experts recommend a one-part bleach to nine-parts water ratio and advise allowing the solution to soak for at least five minutes before wiping the area using a damp cloth.

Structural prevention also plays an important role.

Small gaps around kitchens, storerooms and walls should be sealed because rodents can enter spaces through openings as small as a 10 sen coin.

Prevention begins with overall health

Medical professionals say modern healthcare should focus not only on treating illness, but also strengthening the body's resilience before infections occur.

Maintaining stable blood pressure, healthy glucose levels, proper nutrition and overall good health may help the body cope better with infectious stressors.

Regular medical screenings also remain important, particularly for individuals with chronic health conditions that may weaken the body's ability to respond to infections.

Doctors advise Malaysians to seek immediate medical attention if they develop suspicious symptoms after possible exposure to rodent-contaminated environments.

Early assessment and prompt intervention, they stress, remain the strongest tools in preventing serious complications.

This article is contributed by Alpro Clinic family doctor Kam San Dhit

Status-upgrading works on Limbang Hospital get federal nod

KUCHING: The federal government has approved the allocation for upgrading works on Limbang Hospital to turn it into a major specialist facility, said Deputy Minister for Food Industry, Commodity and Regional Development Datuk Dr Abdul Rahman Ismail.

He said the project's preliminary stage is currently underway, adding that the Health Ministry (MoH) has included this in its plans.

"Limbang Hospital has already been upgraded to a minor specialist hospital, and there is already an allocation

from the federal government to turn it into a major specialist hospital.

"However, this is still in the preliminary stage," said the Bukit Kota assemblyman in officiating at the division-level Heart Failure Update 2026 programme at Limbang District Education Excellence Centre's mini auditorium on Saturday.

Also present were Limbang Hospital representative Dr Chong Wun Khang and its psychiatrist Dr Son Wei Da.

Adding on, Dr Abdul Rahman said preliminary works for the construction of a new block

at Limbang Hospital had been included under the Rolling Plan of the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP), and continued under the 13MP.

"New hospital facilities are urgently needed as Limbang Hospital is already providing various specialist services; thus, requires a proper specialist hospital building or complex to support growing healthcare needs."

The deputy minister also called upon the local medical practitioners to continue enhancing their knowledge on adverse health conditions

commonly affecting the local community such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart complications and infectious diseases.

In this regard, he strongly supported the organisation of courses and seminars related to these conditions, so as to ensure that the healthcare sector would continue providing the best possible services to the community in the district.

A total of 65 representatives of the Lawas and Limbang Health offices, Limbang Hospital and Lawas Hospital took part in the programme.

Slogan gaya hidup sihat tak cukup atasi fenomena 'sakit sebelum menua'

Fenomena 'sakit sebelum menua' semakin ketara dalam kalangan rakyat perlu dilihat sebagai ancaman besar kepada masa depan negara yang 'sihat'. Dalam keadaan Malaysia sedang bergerak pantas menjadi negara menua menjelang 2030 apabila 15 peratus populasinya berusia 60 tahun ke atas, keadaan sebahagian masyarakat menghidap penyakit kronik lebih awal diibaratkan 'bom jangka' oleh pakar kesihatan yang berkongsi pandangan dalam laporan eksklusif *BH*, sejak semalam. Menyedari sistem kesihatan, produktiviti ekonomi dan perlindungan sosial negara saling berkait, *BH* meneliti pelbagai kajian serta mendapatkan pandangan pakar merentas bidang.

Data jelas menunjukkan situasi semakin serius seperti Tinjauan Kebangsaan Kesihatan dan Morbiditi (NHMS) 2025 mendapati dua daripada tiga warga emas menghidap hipertensi, manakala dua daripada lima berdepan diabetes. Lebih membimbangkan, penyakit ini lazimnya bermula sejak usia 40-an atau 50-an sebelum menjadi kronik selepas persaraan. Pada masa sama, hampir separuh pekerja pula dikesan berisiko mengalami keletihan melampau atau burnout akibat tekanan kerja.

Dalam konteks ini, sebarang cadangan menaikkan usia persaraan misalnya perlu dilihat secara realistik dan tidak boleh hanya berasaskan pertimbangan fiskal atau kekurangan tenaga kerja semata-mata. Apa gunanya umur persaraan dipanjangkan jika sebahagian besar rakyat sudah tidak sihat, hilang produktiviti atau mengalami komplikasi penyakit kronik sebelum memasuki usia emas? Negara akhirnya bukan sahaja berdepan peningkatan kos rawatan, bahkan kehilangan modal insan berpengalaman yang sepatutnya terus menyumbang kepada ekonomi dan pemindahan kemahiran.

Hakikatnya, pendekatan sedia ada terlalu bergantung kepada kempen kesedaran umum tidak lagi mencukupi. Kita tidak boleh terus sekadar mengulang slogan gaya hidup sihat tanpa membina ekosistem yang benar-benar memaksa dan menggalakkan rakyat menjaga kesihatan. Pendekatan lebih holistik serta berteraskan kaedah *carrot and stick* perlu dipertimbang secara serius.

Contohnya, kerajaan boleh memperluas insentif kepada syarikat melaksanakan program kesihatan tempat kerja secara menyeluruh termasuk saringan berkala, waktu kerja lebih fleksibel dan sokongan kesihatan mental. Pada masa sama, syarikat atau organisasi yang mengabaikan keselamatan serta kesejahteraan pekerja sehingga menyumbang kepada tekanan melampau pula perlu dipantau lebih ketat.

Selain itu, budaya saringan kesihatan perlu dijadikan norma sosial. Pendedahan hanya 27 peratus individu layak menggunakan PeKa Sihat (Peka B40) tampil menjalani pemeriksaan walaupun ia percuma menunjukkan masalah bukan sekadar akses, tetapi sikap dan literasi kesihatan rakyat. Ini bermakna reformasi kesihatan perlu bergerak daripada konsep *sick care* kepada *healthcare* seperti ditegaskan pakar kesihatan awam. Ini bermakna penekanan mesti diberikan kepada pencegahan, pengesanan awal dan kesejahteraan menyeluruh, bukannya menunggu rakyat jatuh sakit sebelum sistem bertindak.

Isu 'sakit sebelum menua' bukan sekadar soal hospital sesak atau kos rawatan meningkat, tetapi menyentuh masa depan ekonomi, daya saing negara dan kemampuan rakyat menikmati usia tua secara sejahtera. Jika ia tidak ditangani sekarang melalui reformasi lebih berani dan menyeluruh, negara mungkin berdepan generasi hidup lebih lama, tetapi dalam keadaan uzur, tidak produktif dan bergantung penuh kepada sistem sokongan yang semakin tertekan.

Isu kesihatan pekerja jejas pembangunan ekonomi

Pertumbuhan tidak sekata kesan kelemahan produktiviti tenaga buruh

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Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia berdepan risiko pertumbuhan ekonomi rapuh dan tidak berkualiti sekiranya isu kesihatan pekerja gagal ditangani secara menyeluruh dalam tempoh lima hingga 10 tahun akan datang.

Timbalan Ketua Pengarah Perbadanan Produktiviti Malaysia (MPC), Dr Mohamad Norjayadi Tamam, berkata Malaysia berpotensi memperkukuh pertumbuhan ekonomi dan produktiviti jika isu kesihatan pekerja bersama kemahiran, teknologi dan reka bentuk kerja ditangani secara bersepadu.

Dalam keadaan itu, katanya, Malaysia mungkin mencatat pertumbuhan ekonomi tetapi tidak cukup berkualiti untuk menyokong lonjakan lebih kukuh ke arah ekonomi bernilai tinggi.

“Dari perspektif MPC, risiko terbesar ialah apabila produktiviti buruh Malaysia meningkat secara sederhana, tetapi asas yang menyokong produktiviti itu melemah.

“Jika kesihatan fizikal dan mental pekerja terus terjejas, reka bentuk kerja kekal tidak cekap, jurang kemahiran tidak ditangani dan firma terus menanggungkan pelaburan dalam teknologi serta pembangunan bakat, produktiviti yang dicapai mungkin tidak stabil dan tidak mampan,” katanya kepada BH.

Mohamad Norjayadi berkata, syarikat mungkin mampu mengekalkan *output* melalui intensifikasi kerja atau penjimatan kos dalam jangka pendek, namun memberi tekanan besar kepada tenaga kerja dalam tempoh sederhana dan panjang.

Beliau berkata, gabungan beberapa tekanan struktur jangka semakin ketara lima hingga 10 tahun akan datang dengan antara cabaran utama ialah peningkatan penyakit kronik, keletihan melampau, tekanan kerja dan isu kesejahteraan mental.

“Selain itu, faktor penuaan penduduk yang mengubah komposisi tenaga kerja, perubahan teknologi pesat dan ketidakpa-



Keratan akhbar
BH semalam.

dan kemahiran dijangka memberi tekanan besar kepada ekonomi negara.

“Ia juga boleh menyebabkan kos operasi meningkat tanpa penambahbaikan sepadan dalam nilai tambah, kadar inovasi yang lebih perlahan serta pelaburan lebih berhati-hati kerana firma berdepan ketidakpastian berkaitan bakat dan prestasi tenaga kerja,” katanya.

Pembangunan tak seimbang

Mohamad Norjayadi berkata, keadaan itu berisiko mewujudkan situasi hanya sebahagian firma dan sektor mampu bergerak ke hadapan, manakala sebahagian

“Malaysia berisiko berdepan pertumbuhan yang semakin sempit dari segi nilai tambah dan semakin tidak sekata dari segi agihan manfaatnya”

Mohamad Norjayadi Tamam,
Timbalan Ketua Pengarah
Perbadanan Produktiviti Malaysia



besar lagi tertahan dalam model perniagaan yang bergantung kepada kos rendah, kerja bernilai rendah dan produktiviti yang terbatas.

Katanya, manfaat pertumbuhan ekonomi akan semakin tidak sekata jika peningkatan produktiviti hanya tertumpu kepada kelompok firma tertentu sahaja.

Risiko itu juga, katanya, relevan dalam daya saing negara ketika Malaysia kini berada di kedudukan ke-23 dalam IMD World Competitiveness Ranking 2025.

“Pencapaian itu memberangsangkan namun perlu diperkukuh melalui reformasi lebih mendalam di peringkat tenaga kerja dan firma.

“Daya saing masa depan tidak lagi ditentukan kos buruh rendah semata-mata, tetapi kemampuan negara membina tenaga kerja yang sihat, berkemahiran, tahan lasak dan mampu menyesuaikan diri dengan transformasi kerja.

“Jika isu kesihatan pekerja, teknologi dan bakat tidak ditangani secara bersepadu, Malaysia berisiko berdepan pertumbuhan yang semakin sempit dari segi nilai tambah dan semakin tidak sekata dari segi agihan manfaatnya.

“Ringkasnya, risiko utama dalam tempoh lima hingga 10 tahun ialah pertumbuhan yang tidak cukup produktif, tidak cukup inklusif dan tidak cukup tahan lasak untuk menyokong peralihan Malaysia ke ekonomi bernilai tinggi,” katanya.

Reformasi dasar kritikal elak ‘sakit sebelum menua’

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia perlu melaksanakan reformasi dasar kritikal bagi mengelak terjerumus ke dalam fenomena ‘sakit sebelum menua’ susulan krisis serentak membabitkan kesihatan rakyat dan produktiviti tenaga kerja.

Penganalisis Kesejahteraan Sosial, Dr Amjad Rabi, berkata trend penuaan penduduk yang semakin pantas digabung dengan profil kesihatan yang melemah dalam kalangan tenaga kerja, memberi implikasi besar bukan sahaja kepada kesejahteraan individu tetapi juga daya saing ekonomi negara secara keseluruhan.

Beliau yang juga Penyelidik Kanan Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC) Universiti Malaya berkata, produktiviti pekerja terjejas akibat penyakit tidak berjangkit (NCD), tekanan kesi-

hatan mental dan akses penjagaan kesihatan yang tidak sekata, sekali gus meningkatkan kos kepada majikan, sistem kesihatan dan kerajaan.

Secara keseluruhan, katanya, krisis kesihatan dan produktiviti pekerja yang berkembang menuntut pendekatan dasar bersepadu serta berani.

Beliau berkata, struktur perlindungan sosial sedia ada dilihat belum cukup bersedia untuk menyerap tekanan jangka panjang itu, khususnya dari segi liputan dan kecukupan perlindungan pendapatan.

“Tanpa intervensi dasar menyeluruh, Malaysia berdepan generasi warga emas yang hidup lebih lama tetapi keadaan kesihatan kurang baik tanpa kewangan mencukupi,” katanya.

Amjad berkata, satu kerangka reformasi komprehensif berasas-

kan sistem perlindungan sosial pelbagai lapisan perlu dilaksanakan bagi memberi tumpuan kepada dua isu utama iaitu jurang liputan dan kecukupan perlindungan.

Katanya, keutamaan pertama ialah mewujudkan ‘lantai perlindungan warga emas’, iaitu penempatan asas tanpa caruman untuk golongan sasaran.

“Ia bertujuan menjamin tahap minimum keselamatan pendapatan, khususnya bagi golongan tidak dilindungi skim caruman seperti pekerja sektor tidak formal.

“Pada masa sama, ia dapat mengurangkan risiko kemiskinan warga emas secara lebih mampan dari sudut fiskal,” katanya.

Beliau menegaskan, semua pihak harus fokus kepada penstrukturan semula sistem pengeluaran simpanan persaraan bagi

meningkatkan kelestarian pendapatan selepas bersara.

“Daripada membenarkan pengeluaran penuh sekali gus, sistem dicadang beralih kepada pembayaran berperingkat dan berkala.

“Sebahagian simpanan diagih secara bulanan dalam tempoh tertentu bagi memastikan aliran pendapatan konsisten serta mengurangkan risiko kehabisan simpanan terlalu awal.

“Reformasi ini akan diselaraskan dengan lantai perlindungan bagi memastikan kesinambungan pendapatan sepanjang tempoh persaraan,” katanya.

Beliau berkata, pencairan Kumpulan Wang Simpanan Pekerja (KWSP) sedia ada boleh memilih menyertai secara sukarela, manakala peserta baharu akan tertakluk kepada struktur baharu.

Label 'sifar gula' tak bermakna produk tiada bahan pemanis

Pengguna perlu fahami maksud sebenar, semak senarai ramuan pastikan pilihan selamat

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Kuala Lumpur: Pelbagai jenama minuman tanpa kalori 'sifar gula' dijual di pasaran, dikesan kerap dipromosi sebagai pilihan selamat untuk pesakit diabetes dan dikatakan sesuai bagi golongan berdiet.

Taktik pemasaran itu membuatkan ramai tertarik mengambil minuman manis 'bebas gula' atau 'sifar gula' kerana meyakini promosi kurang atau tiada gula serta kalori, sekali gus mewujudkan persepsi ia pilihan sebaik meminum air kosong.

Hakikatnya, pengguna kurang memahami maksud sebenar istilah 'sifar gula' atau kandungan dinyatakan pada label setiap produk.

Peraturan-Peraturan Makanan 1985 menetapkan, istilah 'sifar gula' atau 'bebas gula' merujuk kepada produk yang mengandungi gula tidak melebihi 0.5 gram (g) bagi setiap 100g atau 100 mililiter (ml).

Istilah tiada gula tambahan bermakna tiada gula ditambah

ketika pemprosesan, tetapi tetap mempunyai gula semula jadi daripada bahan seperti susu, produk tenusu atau buah-buahan.

Pensyarah Kanan dan Pakar Dietetik Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Dr Noraida Omar, berkata pengguna perlu memahami maksud sebenar label digunakan pada pembungkusan produk supaya dapat membuat pilihan sihat dan selamat.

"Label 'bebas gula' atau 'sifar gula' tidak bermakna produk itu bebas sepenuhnya daripada bahan itu.

"Pengguna perlu bertanggungjawab menyemak senarai ramuan dan maklumat pemakanan sebelum membuat pilihan," katanya kepada BH.

Mengulas jenis pemanis yang lazim digunakan sebagai pengganti gula, Noraida berkata, ia terbahagi kepada dua kumpulan. "Kumpulan pertama ialah pemanis intensiti tinggi seperti stevia, sucralose, aspartame dan acesulfame potassium (Ace-K).

"Pemanis ini digunakan secara meluas sebagai pengganti 'gula meja' dan dalam minuman diet, berkarbonat, isotonik serta pelbagai makanan rendah kalori.

"Ia sangat manis walaupun digunakan dalam jumlah kecil dan secara amnya tidak meningkatkan paras gula dalam darah, namun kesannya bergantung kepada keseluruhan kandungan

makanan atau minuman itu," katanya.

Beliau berkata, kumpulan kedua ialah 'sugar alcohols' atau polyols seperti erythritol dan maltitol yang memberikan rasa hampir menyamai gula serta mengandungi sedikit kalori.

"Ia digunakan dalam produk bakeri dan konfeksi seperti gula-gula getah, gula-gula, coklat dan pudina, produk penjagaan mulut seperti ubat gigi dan cecair kumur, selain terkandung dalam sirap batuk dan tablet hisap untuk melegakan ketidakselesaan tekak," katanya.

Noraida berkata, erythritol mempunyai kesan rendah terhadap paras gula dalam darah, manakala maltitol boleh memberi kesan sederhana.

"Pengambilan berlebihan khususnya polyols boleh menyebabkan ketidakselesaan seperti kembung atau cirit-birit.

"Had pengambilan harian yang

selamat ditetapkan badan antarabangsa seperti Jawatankuasa Pakar Bersama Pertubuhan Makanan dan Pertanian / Pertubuhan Kesihatan Sedunia (FAO/WHO) mengenai Bahan Tambahan Makanan dan Pihak Berkuasa Keselamatan Makanan Eropah.

"Sebagai contoh, sucralose dan Ace-K dibenarkan sehingga 15 miligram (mg) sehari bagi setiap kilogram (kg) berat badan, stevia 4 mg/kg sehari dan aspartame 40 mg/kg sehari, manakala erythritol dikategorikan sebagai selamat pada tahap penggunaan biasa," katanya.

Kurangkan risiko obesiti

Di negara ini, katanya, penggunaannya dikawal di bawah Peraturan-Peraturan Makanan 1985 oleh Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM).

"KKM melalui Panduan Diet Malaysia (2020) dan WHO (2015) menyarankan pengambilan gula tambahan atau gula bebas dihad tidak melebihi 10 peratus dari

pada keperluan tenaga harian.

"Pengurangan kepada bawah lima peratus digalakkan untuk memperoleh manfaat kesihatan tambahan untuk mengurangkan risiko obesiti, diabetes dan kerosakan gigi.

"Gula bebas merujuk kepada gula yang ditambah ke dalam makanan dan minuman serta gula semula jadi yang terdapat dalam madu, sirap, jus dan pati buah.

"Individu dengan keperluan tenaga 1500 kilokalori (kcal) sehari, had 10 peratus ini bersamaan kira-kira 37.5 gram atau 7.5 sudu teh gula sehari, namun realiti pengambilan gula dalam kalangan rakyat negara ini masih membimbangkan," katanya.

Memetik Laporan Tinjauan Kebangsaan Kesihatan dan Morbiditi (NHMS) 2024 pula ia menunjukkan prevalens individu remaja dan dewasa yang mempunyai jumlah pengambilan gula bebas melebihi paras yang disyorkan masing-masing adalah 63.1 peratus dan 47 peratus.

Hasil laporan sama mendapati individu dewasa mengambil gula bebas sekitar sembilan sudu teh sehari iaitu 4.5 sudu teh (21.9 g) daripada minuman dan 4.5 sudu teh (20.9 g) daripada makanan dan amalan ini dikenal pasti sebagai antara penyumbang utama kepada peningkatan penyakit tidak berjangkit seperti diabetes, gangguan metabolik dan obesiti.

Noraida menegaskan, orang ramai perlu melihat maklumat pemakanan khususnya bahagian jumlah karbohidrat dan bukan hanya tertumpu jumlah gula.

Pengguna perlu bertanggungjawab menyemak senarai ramuan dan maklumat pemakanan sebelum membuat pilihan

Dr Noraida Omar,
Pensyarah Kanan dan Pakar
Dietetik Universiti Putra Malaysia



JIHAD PERANGI 'KARTEL' VAPE

Antara kesihatan & kuasa industri



Bersama
**Mohd Jamil
Anbia Md Denin**



Keputusan hakim membuktikan bahawa artikel diterbitkan Harian Metro adalah berasaskan kepentingan dan kesedaran awam. Sekali gus membersihkan nama penulis daripada sebarang tuduhan niat jahat

alam kandang saksi Mahkamah Tinggi Kuala Lumpur, suasana tegang seketika apabila penulis dituduh menghina proses keadilan. Isunya remeh, hanya kerana penulis tersenyum sinis ketika diasak dengan soalan oleh peguam pihak lawan ketika sesi perbicaraan.

Syarikat kartel cecair vape yang diwakili peguam itu menyaman Harian Metro atas dakwaan memfitnah mereka.

Tindakan itu kelihatan janggal memandangkan Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) sendiri membuktikan kewujudan cecair nikotin dalam produk mereka hasil serbuan dilakukan sebelum ini. Ia jelas melanggar Akta Racun 1952 dan membahayakan nyawa awam.

Namun, kebenaran tidak boleh diputar belit. Hakim Mahkamah Tinggi akhirnya memutuskan bahawa pihak plaintif gagal membuktikan kes sivil itu lalu memerintahkan mereka membayar kos melebihi RM30,000.

Keputusan hakim itu membuktikan bahawa artikel diterbitkan Harian Metro adalah berasaskan kepentingan dan kesedaran awam. Sekali gus membersihkan nama penulis daripada sebarang tuduhan niat jahat.

Selepas kes berakhir, perjuangan penulis diteruskan. Masyarakat perlu didedahkan ancaman dan bahaya vape.

Bukan berdendam, tapi ini 'jihad' membasmi bahaya yang kini memusnahkan kesihatan belia hingga kepada remaja sekolah.

Ternyata kartel jutawan vape mengaut untung besar. Melobi dan memastikan 'industri' vape nikotin kekal bernyawa. Mereka bukan picisan. Ada pengaruh dan 'dipayung'.

Buktinya Akta Kawalan Produk Merokok Demi Kesihatan Awam 2024 (Akta 852) bermula Oktober 2024 bertujuan mengawal penjualan dan penggunaan produk vape terutama kepada golongan bawah umur seolah-olah langsung tidak membawa kesan.

Kajian Kesihatan dan Morbiditi Kebangsaan (NHMS) oleh Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia mendedahkan peratusan remaja berumur 13 hingga 17 tahun yang

menghisap rokok elektronik atau vape meningkat mendadak setiap tahun.

Berulang kali penulis mendedahkan ancaman bahaya vape. Ramai yang terlantar di hospital akibat radang dan kecederaan paru-paru teruk dikenali sebagai EVALI (*E-Cigarette or Vaping Product Use-Associated Lung Injury*).

Dada mangsa terpekasa ditebuk bagi menyelamatkan nyawa apabila paru-paru mangsa bocor (*pneumothorax*) atau paru-paru berair (*pleural effusion*) kesan vape dihisap.

Walaupun pelbagai kajian antarabangsa berulang kali membangkitkan kebimbangan kesan nikotin dan bahan kimia dalam rokok elektronik, namun vape masih bebas dijual di pasaran tempatan dengan kawalan longgar.

Pelbagai perisa manis, reka bentuk moden dan pemasaran agresif menjadikan produk itu mudah diterima melangkaui kebimbangan besar komuniti perubatan.

Kini muncul pula ancaman baharu jauh lebih mengerutkan dikenali sebagai 'vape zombie' yang dicampur bahan sintetik berbahaya termasuk *furanylfentanyl* dikesan.

Dadah sintetik dan bahan halusinogen ini menyebabkan pengguna khayal, hilang kawalan, mengalami kerosakan otak, malah membawa maut.

Dalam polemik yang semakin hangat ketika ini, isu vape turut dikaitkan dengan perdebatan berkaitan Akta

Racun 1952 dan pengawalan nikotin.

Keputusan kerajaan sebelum ini mengeluarkan cecair dan gel nikotin daripada senarai bahan di bawah Akta Racun membuka ruang luas kepada penjualan vape bernikotin secara lebih terbuka. Di mana rasional keputusan ini?

Di media sosial, vape dipromosikan sebagai alternatif lebih 'selamat' berbanding rokok konvensional.

Masyarakat perlu berhenti melihat vape sekadar sebagai 'wap berperisa'.

Kajian cukup jelas, vape menghasilkan aerosol yang disedut terus dalam paru-paru.

Aerosol ini boleh mengandungi nikotin, bahan kimia penyebab kanser seperti *formaldehyde*, partikel halus, logam berat serta bahan perisa yang berpotensi memudaratkan sistem pernafasan apabila dipanaskan.

Ramai pengguna gagal memahami bahawa wap dihasilkan vape bukan sekadar air biasa, sebaliknya campuran bahan kimia yang melalui proses pemanasan sebelum disedut masuk dalam sistem pernafasan.

Antara kebimbangan utama pakar kesihatan ialah kandungan tinggi nikotin yang boleh menyebabkan ketagihan serius terutama dalam kalangan remaja.

Isu vape bukan lagi sekadar soal pilihan individu. Ia adalah isu perlindungan generasi muda dan masa depan negara.

Sahabat penulis yang juga pensyarah, Prof Dr Haniki Nik Mohamed berbandangan masyarakat kini menyaksikan satu naratif jahat yang semakin agresif dimainkan pihak industri berkaitan usaha kerajaan untuk memperketat kawalan terhadap vape.

Menurutnya, naratif itu cuba menggambarkan 'kononnya' langkah kerajaan untuk menggariskan vape bakal merugikan ekonomi negara, menjejaskan hasil cukai serta membuka ruang kepada pasaran gelap.

Setiap kali kerajaan mula mengambil langkah tegas demi melindungi kesihatan awam, industri vape segera memainkan sentimen ketakutan terhadap rakyat.

Beliau menegaskan bahawa persoalan utama bukan semata-mata berkaitan jumlah hasil cukai yang mungkin terjejas, sebaliknya mengapa industri kelihatan begitu cemas apabila kerajaan mahu memperketat kawalan terhadap vape.

Pada pandangan penulis, pembuat dasar perlu kembali kepada persoalan paling asas iaitu sama ada sesuatu dasar itu bertujuan melindungi rakyat atau melindungi pasaran.

Nikotin tetap nikotin. Ketagihan tetap ketagihan. Keburukannya bukan kisah tahyul.

Penulis Pengarang Berita Harian Metro

dialog kotaraya oleh yon

