

Public hospitals will run 24/7 during Raya

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PUTRAJAYA: Public hospitals nationwide will continue operating around the clock during the upcoming Hari Raya Aidilfitri public holidays, confirms Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

His assurance follows Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's announcement of an additional public holiday for the festive period, bringing the total to three days.

Dzulkefly said services at hospitals under the ministry will remain unchanged despite the extended holiday period, with medical staff continuing to work on a 24-hour basis similar to other public holidays.

"Operations at our hospitals will continue as usual for 24 hours, just like any other public holiday. We work around the clock," he said during a press conference here yesterday.

He added that healthcare personnel who have been scheduled for on-call duties will continue providing services at ministry hospitals nationwide.

Dzulkefly also said patients, whose appointments at specialist clinics or day treatment centres fall on the public holiday, will be given new dates.

"For patients whose specialist clinic or day treatment appointments fall on the public holiday, they will be contacted and provided with a new appointment date," he said.

He added that the ministry will continue monitoring health-related developments that could affect



Bots to the rescue: The Cik Era AI-based programme being introduced to the public.

— Bernama

(Inset) Dzulkefly announcing the introduction of the campaign in Putrajaya. — LOW LAY PHON/The Star

public safety during the festive period. He said this would be done by the Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC) at both the state and national levels to ensure any public health incidents are promptly addressed.

Earlier, Dzulkefly also announced the introduction of Cik Era AI, an upgraded version of the Cik Era chatbot which was launched on Oct 15, 2024 to support smoking cessation efforts.

He said the artificial intelli-

gence-powered assistant has been integrated into the JomQuit website as a virtual companion accessible 24 hours a day to provide encouragement, information and guidance to individuals who wish to quit smoking.

"The JomQuit initiative recorded encouraging results, with 2,476 participants successfully quitting smoking, representing a success

rate of about 58.5%," he said.

He added that the platform has recorded 9,200 interactions with Cik Era, with 9,349 registered clients and 4,858 consultations conducted so far.

However, 1,434 individuals indicated they were not interested in continuing with the programme, while 3,056 could not be contacted, he said.

In conjunction with World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) on March 15), themed "Safe Products, Confident Consumers", the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the Malaysian government to ensure that all play and craft sand products available in the Malaysian market are free from asbestos, one of the 10 chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Recent product recalls and market withdrawals in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom were prompted by laboratory tests of play and craft sand products that detected traces of asbestos, particularly tremolite. Asbestos is a naturally occurring group of fibrous minerals that occurs in different mineral forms and fibre types. All asbestos fibre types, regardless of size, have

the potential to pose a health risk if fibres become airborne and are inhaled.

Asbestos is officially classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as a Group 1 carcinogen, which means it is a known cause of cancer in humans. There is no known safe level of asbestos exposure. The health risks to children are compounded by developmental vulnerability and frequent hand-to-mouth behaviours, increasing the likelihood of ingestion or inhalation, particularly for young children.

Asbestos-contaminated play and craft sand products have been recalled or removed, and public warnings have been issued in these countries as a precaution to prevent asbestos

exposure. In Malaysia, however, these products continue to be widely sold in retail shops and online marketplaces. Products such as mouldable sensory sands (often labelled as kinetic or "magic" sand), sand art kits, and beach sand play sets remain popular across the country. These products are frequently used by young children for creative and sensory activities, increasing the likelihood of prolonged handling and potential exposure. The continued availability and use of these products in Malaysia highlights a concerning gap in local consumer safety enforcement.

This issue must be taken seriously in Malaysia. As the government reviews the continued use of asbestos-based materials

and considers a phase-down to ban chrysotile, there is a need to conduct a study to identify products that contain asbestos. Since sand-based play and craft products have been highlighted as containing asbestos, the relevant authority should take measures to test these products to ensure they are free of asbestos, as young children, the primary users, are most vulnerable to its harmful effects.

For consumers who have purchased these products, we advise them to stop using any unidentified sand products immediately. As prescribed by regulators in countries that have recalled the products, if the sand is still in its packaging, place it in a heavy-duty plastic bag, double-tape it securely, label it clearly and store it in a

secure location out of the reach of children. If the sand is used, clean up the site where the product was used with wet cloths to avoid dust. Wear gloves and a mask. Double-bag the sand, gloves, mask, and cloths. Keep children and others away from areas where sand has been used until they are cleaned.

Ensuring access to safe, trustworthy products reflects the key message of World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) 2026: "Safety must not be a privilege". Unsafe products threaten lives and undermine fundamental consumer rights, and children should never face preventable risks from toys or craft materials that are assumed to be safe.

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Toxic sand: a silent threat

FORM TO DEFER MEDICAL DEPOSITS

Health Ministry probes into alleged 'Attachment A' abuse by foreigners

PUTRAJAYA: Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad has denied claims that "Attachment A" (Lampiran A), a document used in government hospitals, is being abused by foreigners to avoid paying medical deposits.

The claim, allegedly posted by a nurse at Kuala Lumpur Hospital's emergency department, suggested that foreign patients could bypass the RM2,800 admis-

sion deposit by declaring they did not possess a passport and requesting the use of "Attachment A".

He clarified that the document applied only to critical emergency cases handled at hospital emergency departments.

The form allows hospitals to temporarily defer the deposit requirement so that patients in life-threatening situations can receive immediate treatment.

"Attachment A only allows for a postponement of payment while resuscitation and stabilisation are carried out.

"It does not exempt patients from payment.

"This is part of our 'no wrong door policy', which ensures emergency cases are treated immediately to stabilise the patient and remove them from immediate danger."

Once patients are stabilised

and admitted to wards, he said, the process of collecting the required deposit will proceed.

"So it is not correct to say that they receive treatment for free or that they are exempted from payment.

"And this practice is applied across all emergency and trauma facilities under the Health Ministry nationwide," he said.

Dzulkefly added that the Health Ministry was aware of the

concerns raised online and would continue monitoring the matter to ensure existing procedures are not misused.

"We have not yet verified the authenticity of the report, but it is important for us to investigate the matter thoroughly.

"At the same time, we must respect those who come forward with information, and we also want whistleblowers to be protected."