

AKHBAR : BERITA HARIAN

MUKA SURAT : 6

RUANGAN : NASIONAL

Penularan COVID-19



Fadillah bersama Khairy Jamaluddin melihat pelan pembangunan Hospital Baharu Sri Aman selepas Majlis Penyerahan Projek Hospital Baharu Sri Aman di Sri Aman. (Foto Alizuddin Saad/BH)

Jangan 'cacatkan' pindaan Akta 342

KKM sudah beri taklimat kepada semua ahli Parlimen

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Sri Aman: Menteri Kesihatan, Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar meminta semua ahli Parlimen terutama pembangkang supaya tidak 'mencacatkan' pindaan Akta Pencegahan dan Pengawalan Penyakit Berjangkit 1988 (Akta 342).

Beliau berkata, taklimat sudah diberikan kepada semua ahli Parlimen pada Isnin lalu yang mana Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) sudah menyediakan garis pandu-

an sebaik Akta 342 dipinda.

"Garis panduan ini meletakkan beberapa syarat sebelum jumlah kompaun dikeluarkan dan garis panduan ini melindungi daripada berlaku apa-apa kompaun yang terlalu zalim terhadap rakyat."

"Tidak mungkin kita nak bagi kompaun RM10,000 kalau tak pakai pelitup muka. Itu jumlah maksimum kepada individu. Bagi perbadanan pertubuhan seperti syarikat yang mungkin dikenakan kompaun mengikut garis panduan, adalah 'repeat offender' (pelaku berulang) yang menyebabkan kluster di kilang mereka berulang kali," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian pada sidang media selepas menyempurnakan Majlis Penyerahan Projek Hospital Baharu Sri Aman bersama Menteri Kanan Kerja Raya, Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof di sini, semalam.

Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan, Tan

Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah pada sidang media kelmari mengenai RUU Pindaan Akta 342, menjelaskan ia membabitkan cadangan lima peruntukan baharu dan lima pindaan bagi memastikan kesinambungan penguatkuasaan peruntukan mengikut Ordinan Darurat, sebelum ini.

Apabila diluluskan Dewan Rakyat kelak, ia antara lain menyakiskan penurunan kuasa untuk pelaksanaan penguatkuasaan, peruntukan mengenakan tindakan terhadap pertubuhan perbadanan dan penalti am terhadap individu serta pertubuhan perbadanan.

Mengulas lanjut, Khairy berkata, jumlah kompaun terbabit wajar dikenakan terhadap syarikat yang berulang kali melakukan kesalahan sehingga mewujudkan kluster COVID-19.

"Syarikat ini pendapatannya berbilion ringgit setahun. Jadi,

kalau akta sedia ada membenarkan KKM beri kompaun RM1,000 kepada kilang yang sudah banyak kali menjadi kluster (itu tidak adil). Dan, saya ada contoh banyak kilang sedemikian. Jadi, selepas kita membuat penilaian dan mendapati itu silap mereka, memang patutlah kita ambil tindakan," katanya.

Khairy berkata, beliau akan membawa garis panduan terbabit kepada Jawatankuasa Pilihan Khas Parlimen secepat mungkin bagi membolehkan Parlimen meneliti perinciannya selepas akta berkenaan lulus, esok.

"Itu sebab adanya jawatankuasa ini untuk kita sama-sama melihat kepada perincian garis panduan ini. Tetapi perincian garis panduan itu janggal untuk diletakkan dalam akta induk dan memang tiada pun dalam akta induk mana-mana rang undang-undang. Ia diperhalusi dalam peraturan dan garis panduan. Itu yang biasa dibuat," katanya sambil me-

nambah garis panduan itu juga bertujuan mengekang penyalahgunaan kuasa.

"Jadi, soal tak pakai pelitup muka akan kena kompaun RM10,000 (maksimum), itu tidak betul. Memang kita sudah ada garis panduan supaya tidak ada penyalahgunaan kuasa."

"Saya merayu untuk bawa pindaan kali ini kerana esok adalah hari terakhir Parlimen bersidang tahun ini dan kalau nak tunggu, kena tunggu Mac tahun depan. Kita tak tahu apa akan berlaku dalam tempoh dua bulan akan datang," katanya.

Beliau berharap, ahli Parlimen memahami dan bekerjasama dengannya dalam Jawatankuasa Pilihan Khas Parlimen bagi memperhalusi bersama garis panduan serta peraturan berhubung Akta 342 secepat mungkin.

"Saya meminta supaya jangan 'tempangkan' KKM sekiranya kita tak dapat pinda akta ini," katanya.

AKHBAR : HARIAN METRO

MUKA SURAT : 6

RUANGAN : COVID-19

97.3% dewasa lengkap divaksin

Kuala Lumpur: Seramai 25,515,074 individu atau 97.3 peratus populasi dewasa di negara ini lengkap menerima suntikan vaksin Covid-19 setakat jam 11.59 kelmarin.

Berdasarkan data Kementerian Kesihatan menerusi laman Covidnow, sebanyak 98.6 peratus atau 23,102,672 golongan itu menerima sekurang-kurangnya satu dos vaksin.

Sementara itu, 89.8 peratus populasi remaja atau 2,826,872 individu berusia 12 dan 17 tahun menerima satu dos vaksin manakala 89.8 peratus atau 2,726,239 individu golongan itu telah lengkap divaksinasi.

Sejumlah 129,387 dos vaksin diberi kelmarin melibatkan 4,027 dos pertama, 4,970 dos lengkap dan 120,390 dos penggalak.

Perkembangan itu menjadikan sejumlah 55,039,657 dos vaksin termasuk 3,787,928 dos penggalak telah diberikan menerusi Program Imunisasi Covid-19 Kebangsaan (Pick).

AKHBAR : HARIAN METRO
 MUKA SURAT : 11
 RUANGAN : LOKAL

MEMANG PATUT KENA RM1 JUTA

Kilang langgar SOP berkali-kali perlu diberi hukuman lebih berat

Sri Aman

Kilang yang melanggar prosedur operasi standard (SOP) Covid-19 sehingga berkali-kali mencetuskan kluster kilang memang wajar dikompaun sehingga RM1 juta.

Menteri Kesihatan, Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar berkata, ia boleh dilakukan apabila pindaan Akta Pencegahan dan Pengawalan Penyakit Berjangkit 1998 (Akta 342) diluluskan.

"Syarikat ini pendapatannya berbilion ringgit setahun. Jadi kalau akta sedia ada membenarkan KKM beri kompaun RM1,000 kepada kilang yang banyak kali menjadi kluster (itu tidak adil) dan saya ada contoh banyak kilang

sedemikian.

"Jadi selepas kita membuat penilaian dan mendapati itu silap mereka, memang patutlah kita ambil tindakan," katanya, semalam.

Khairy Jamaluddin berkata demikian selepas menyempurnakan Majlis Penyerahan Projek Hospital Baharu Sri Aman bersama Menteri Kanan Kerja Raya, Datuk Seri Fadil-

lah Yusof di sini.

Kelmarin, Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan, Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah pada sidang media khas mengenai RUU Pindaan Akta 342 menjelaskan, ia membabitkan cadangan li-

ma peruntukan baharu dan lima pindaan bagi memastikan kesinambungan penguatkuasaan peruntukan mengikut Ordinan Darurat sebelum ini.

Apabila diluluskan Dewan Rakyat, ia antara lain menyaksikan penurunan kuasa untuk pelaksanaan penguatkuasaan, peruntukan mengenakan tindakan terhadap pertubuhan perbadanan dan penalti am terhadap individu serta pertubuhan perbadanan.

Pada masa sama, Kesihatan Khairy turut meminta semua ahli parlimen terutama pembangkang, supaya tidak menampakan pindaan Akta Pencegahan dan Pengawalan Penyakit Berjangkit 1988 (Akta 342).



Puji Malaysia kendali Covid-19

Putrajaya: Setiausaha Negara Amerika Syarikat Antony J Blinken semalam memuji kepimpinan Malaysia dalam mengendalikan pandemik Covid-19 dan menghargai sumbangan negara kepada COVAX, sebuah inisiatif global untuk perkongsian vaksin.

Blinken berkata, kerana kepimpinan dan kejayaan luar biasa itu membolehkan Malaysia mempunyai kapasiti untuk menyumbang lebih vaksin ke negara lain dan kepada COVAX.

"Ia bukti kepemimpinan sebenar dan amat dihargai," katanya pada sidang media bersama Menteri Luar Datuk



Kita perlu ambil peluang ini untuk kukuhkan sistem keselamatan kesihatan global. Jadi, pada masa akan datang kita lebih berupaya untuk mencegah, mengesan dan mungkin menangani pandemik baharu dengan lebih berkesan"

Antony J Blinken

Saifuddin Abdullah.

Beliau berkata, ketika mesyuarat dua hala dengan Saifuddin, kedua-dua pihak menyentuh mengenai apa yang boleh dilakukan bersama untuk mengatasi cabaran semasa Covid-19 dan membuat persiapan lebih baik untuk menangani pandemik pada masa depan.

"Kita perlu ambil peluang ini untuk kukuhkan sistem keselamatan kesihatan global. Jadi pada masa akan datang kita lebih berupaya untuk mencegah, mengesan dan mungkin menangani pandemik baharu dengan lebih berkesan," katanya.

Blinken tiba di Kuala Lum-

pur pada Selasa malam untuk mengadakan lawatan kerja dua hari.

Beliau sebelum ini singgah di Jakarta, Indonesia dan akan meneruskan kunjungannya ke Bangkok, Thailand.

Beliau berkata, AS sedang berusaha melaksanakan komitmennya untuk terus menyumbang kepada COVAX, supaya vaksin Covid-19 dapat diagihkan secara saksama.

"Menjelang 2022, AS menjangkakan untuk menyumbang 1.2 bilion vaksin di seluruh dunia, kami mempunyai komitmen untuk bantu apa yang boleh bagi menutup jurang vaksinasi," katanya.

41 pelajar politeknik positif Covid-19

Seremban: Seramai 41 pelajar Politeknik Nilai di Bandar Enstek di sini, dikesan positif Covid-19 membabitkan Kluster Persiaran Pendidikan Nilai.

Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Bertindak Alam Sekitar, Kesihatan, Koperasi dan Penggunaan negeri, S Veerapan berkata, kluster berkenaan mula dilaporkan pada 8 Disember lalu membabitkan pelajar politeknik berkenaan.

Katanya, 11 kes pertama dikesan melalui saringan bersasar pelajar berkenaan menggunakan Antigen Rapid Test Kit (RTK) Saliva pada 3 sehingga 6 Disember lalu.



"Daripada 11 kes yang dikesan itu, seramai 36 kontak rapat dikesan dan 19 daripadanya didapati positif.

"Bagaimanapun, hasil saringan yang dijalankan terhadap 440 pelajar terbabit sehingga jam 12 tengah hari hari ini (semalam) mendapati hanya keseluruhannya 41 po-

sitif Covid-19 manakala 399 orang lagi tidak bergejala," katanya di sini, semalam.

Beliau yang juga Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri (Adun) Repah berkata, 10 yang positif sedang menjalani kuarantin di Pusat Kuarantin dan Rawatan Covid-19 (PKRC) Tampin.

Katanya, seorang daripadanya pula dikuarantin di Hospital Tuanku Ja'afar (HTJ) Seremban manakala selebihnya berada di blok asrama.

"Seramai 38 kontak rapat diasingkan di blok asrama yang berbeza dan setakat ini, 14 kes positif itu pulih dan dibenarkan pulang ke ru-

mah," katanya.

Sementara itu, dalam perkembangan berkaitan, Veerapan berkata pihaknya menerima laporan bahawa terdapat 10 orang daripada satu keluarga di Broga, dekat sini, didapati positif wabak berkenaan.

"Sembilan orang didapati mempunyai kontak rapat dan mereka yang positif itu sudah dihantar ke PKRC Tampin untuk tindakan lanjut.

"Kesemuanya adalah di bawah kawalan dan tidak perlu bimbang," katanya yang menafikan dakwaan di laman sosial mengatakan 40 orang positif Covid-19.

AKHBAR : SINAR HARIAN
MUKA SURAT : 10
RUANGAN : VAKSIN UNTUK RAKYAT

41 pelajar Politeknik Nilai positif Covid-19

SEREMBAN - Seramai 41 pelajar di Politeknik Nilai di sinkdikesan positif Covid-19 membabitkan kluster baharu, Kluster Persiaran Pendidikan Nilai.

Exco Kesihatan, Kepenggunaan dan Alam Sekitar Negeri Sembilan, S Veerapan berkata, sehingga jam 12 tengah hari Rabu, jumlah saringan yang dilaku-

kan adalah sebanyak 440.

"Daripada jumlah tersebut seramai 41 pelajar disahkan positif Covid-19 manakala 399 lagi negatif.

"Seramai 10 pelajar yang positif dihantar untuk menjalani kuarantin di Pusat Kuarantin dan Rawatan Covid-19 (PKRC) Tampin, seorang menerima rawatan di hospital manakala selebih-

nya adalah di blok asrama," katanya dalam satu kenyataan pada Rabu.

Jelasnya, seramai 38 kontak rapat telah diasingkan di blok asrama yang berbeza.

Dalam pada itu beliau berkata, kluster ini mula dilaporkan pada 8 Disember lepas yang melibatkan pelajar-pelajar Politeknik Nilai.

"11 kes pertama dikesan melalui saringan bersasar pelajar-pelajar menggunakan kit ujian pantas (RTK) antigen pada 3 hingga 6 Disember lalu.

"Daripada 11 kes tersebut, seramai 36 kontak rapat dikesan dan keseluruhan 19 kes positif direkodkan daripada 36 kontak rapat terbabit," katanya.

Jangan tempangkan KKM - Khairy

SRI AMAN - Semua ahli Parlimen termasuk daripada blok pembangkang diminta menyokong Rang Undang-Undang (RUU) Pindaan Akta Pencegahan dan Pengawalan Penyakit Berjangkit 1988 (Akta 342) kerana pindaan berkenaan bakal bertindak sebagai 'senjata' tambahan dalam menghadapi pandemik Covid-19.

Menteri Kesihatan, Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar berkata, beliau telah memberi taklimat kepada ahli-ahli Parlimen pada Isnin mengenai garis panduan serta beberapa syarat yang perlu dipatuhi dalam pin-

daan itu sebelum jumlah kompaun dikeluarkan atas setiap kesalahan atau pelanggaran prosedur operasi standard (SOP) pandemik Covid-19.

Katanya, garis panduan itu turut melindungi daripada berlakunya kompaun yang terlalu zalim kepada rakyat.

"Takkanlah kita nak bagi kompaun RM10,000 kalau tidak pakai pelitup muka. Ada syarikat pendapatan berbilion ringgit setahun, jadi kalau akta sedia ada



KHAIRY

hanya membenarkan KKM (Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia) memberi kompaun RM1,000 kepada kilang yang telah banyak kali menjadi kluster, setelah kita buat penilaian kalau itu silap mereka patutlah ambil tindakan.

"Jadi saya minta jangan tempangkan KKM, kalau sekiranya kita tidak dapat pindaan ini. Dari segi perhalusan atau penelitian kita ada garis panduan, ada peraturan dan saya sudah maklumkan kepada pem-

bangkang dan juga semua ahli Parlimen, saya akan bawa garis panduan itu kepada Jawatankuasa Pilihan Khas," katanya.

Khairy berkata demikian dalam sidang akhbar selepas Majlis Penyerahan Projek Cadangan Membina dan Menyiapkan Hospital Baharu Sri Aman Fasa 2 yang turut dihadiri oleh Menteri Kanan Kerja Raya, Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof di sini pada Rabu.

Mengulas lanjut, Khairy turut menolak dakwaan pembangkang pindaan akta tersebut bersifat punitif.

"Kita sudah ada garis panduan supaya tidak ada pe-

nyalaghgunaan kuasa dan saya merayu untuk bawa pindaan ini kali ini sebab esok (Khamis) hari terakhir (sidang Dewan Rakyat) kalau tidak kena tunggu sampai Mac tahun depan, kita tidak tahu apa yang akan berlaku dalam dua bulan akan datang dengan Omicron dan sebagainya.

"Saya tidak mahu jadi punitif. Punitif ini *last resort* (pilihan terakhir) tetapi kita perlu ada semua senjata hadapi pandemik ini. Vaksinasi kita ada, langkah-langkah awal ada, SOP ada, kawalan tetapi takkan soal isu denda tidak ada?" soal beliau. - *Bernama*

AKHBAR : UTUSAN MALAYSIA

MUKA SURAT : 1

RUANGAN : MUKA HADAPAN

Negara luar buru doktor kontrak

Oleh **JUANI MUNIR**
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PETALING JAYA: Ketika tuntutan 23,000 doktor kontrak untuk diserap ke jawatan tetap belum selesai, beberapa negara luar dilihat sedang giat 'pancing' tenaga profesional itu supaya

berhijrah dan berkhidmat di luar negara.

Tinjauan *Utusan Malaysia* di akaun Facebook Hartal Doktor Kontrak melihat terdapat promosi menawarkan peluang kerjaya seperti di Singapura, Australia dan Ireland.

Tawaran tersebut dibuat menerusi hantaran di pelbagai platform media sosial yang kemu-

dian dikongsi dalam Facebook Hartal Doktor Kontrak.

Bercakap kepada *Utusan Malaysia*, Jurucakap Hartal Doktor Kontrak, Dr. Mustapha Kamal A. Aziz berkata, sinar baharu kepada doktor kontrak yang terumbang-ambing itu bermula dua hingga tiga hari lalu.

Bersambung di muka 2

AKHBAR : UTUSAN MALAYSIA
 MUKA SURAT : 2
 RUANGAN : DALAM NEGERI

Negara luar buru doktor kontrak

Dari muka 1

"Sejak promosi peluang kerja di luar negara itu, kami mula nampak harapan untuk meneruskan kepakaran kami.

"Justeru, saya tidak menolak kemungkinan lebih ramai doktor kontrak bakal meninggalkan tanah air kerana sudah ada yang mula memutuskan berhenti lebih awal," kata beliau semasa dihubungi *Utusan Malaysia* semalam.

Menurut beliau, perkembangan tersebut sekali gus membuktikan doktor kontrak tidak rugi jika kerajaan enggan menunaikan tuntutan mereka sebaliknya perkhidmatan kesihatan awam itu mungkin bakal menerima tempas kekurangan pegawai perubatan lsewaktu kemunculan varian baharu Omicron pandemik Covid-19.

Kata beliau, masalah dibangkitkan kumpulan doktor kontrak bukan baru tetapi sudah lima tahun.

"Nasib kami terkanting-kanting termasuk dari segi kebajikan dan peluang kerjaya di bawah Kementerian Kesihatan," katanya.

Sebelum ini, *Utusan Malaysia* melaporkan sekurang-kurangnya 300 lagi daripada baki 23,000 doktor kontrak dijangka berhenti dalam masa terdekat jika permintaan mereka untuk diserap ke jawatan tetap tidak diselesaikan.

Mengulas keputusan penyelesaian isu doktor kontrak bakal diumumkan minggu depan, Dr. Mustapha berkata, pihaknya sudah bosan dengan janji kerajaan kerana bekas Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Seri Dr. Adham Baba sebelum ini turut

Keputusan tuntutan dilantik ke jawatan tetap diumumkan minggu depan selepas dibawa ke Kabinet

Nasib doktor kontrak

Oleh MAUSARAH SUEH RAHM, ANJIDA NASIR dan ALYA AFQUSU KACHAD TARIK

KUALA LUMPUR Keputusan berhubung penyelesaian isu doktor

dibat selepas isu doktor kontrak dibawa kementerian ke dalam mesyuarat Kabinet dalam masa terdekat.

"Kementerian Kesihatan sudah berusaha di peringkat tertinggi, sudah bermesyuarat, me-

akan tahu umum," k mul sem Meny kel yang berapa isu be

menyatakan komitmen sama.

Katanya, janji-janji tersebut adakalanya membuatkan kumpulan doktor kontrak musykil dengan niat sebenar kerajaan.

"Sebelum ini kerajaan pernah berikan janji sama, sekarang pun sama," katanya.

Semalam Timbalan Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Dr. Noor Azmi Ghazali berkata, pengumuman keputusan berhubung penyelesaian isu doktor kontrak melibatkan permohonan lantikan tetap akan diumumkan minggu depan.

Menurut beliau pengumuman tersebut dibuat selepas isu doktor kontrak dibawa kementerian ke dalam mesyuarat Kabinet dalam masa terdekat.

Dalam pada itu, Persatuan Perubatan Malaysia (MMA) mencadangkan kerajaan membuka jawatan tetap baharu secara beransur-ansur selain melanjutkan kontrak doktor kepada 10 tahun.

Presidennya, Dr. Koh Kar Chai berkata, ini antara cadangan diberikan MMA sebagai penyelesaian kepada tuntutan doktor kontrak.

"Lanjutan kontrak doktor

kepada 10 tahun bagi membolehkan pengkhususan diyakini dapat mengurangkan ketegangan antara Kementerian Kesihatan dan kumpulan doktor kontrak.

"Pada masa sama, larangan sementara pengambilan pelajar perubatan ke sekolah perubatan tempatan dan antarabangsa boleh dilakukan bagi memastikan bilangan doktor kontrak tidak bertambah," jelas beliau.

Menurut beliau, sekarang ini terdapat 34 buah institusi perubatan tempatan dan antarabangsa yang setiap tahun menghasilkan 3,000 hingga 6,000 graduan.

Katanya, jika institusi perubatan itu meneruskan pengambilan pelajar, maka isu ini tidak dapat diselesaikan malah bilangan doktor kontrak akan bertambah.

Beliau mengakui, ramai dalam kalangan doktor tiada pilihan selain mencari peluang di luar negara dan sesetengah doktor juga melepaskan kerjaya perubatannya kerana kecewa dengan sistem kerjaya sebagai doktor di negara ini.

UTUSAN
 Malaysia.
 semalam.

AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES

MUKA SURAT : 6

RUANGAN : NEWS / STORY OF THE DAY

ANTIBODY AFFINITY MATURATION

YEARLY COVID JABS UNLIKELY, SAYS EXPERT

Boosters produce high levels of 'sharpshooter' antibodies, says specialist

DHESEGAAN BALA KRISHNAN
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AN infectious diseases expert said it is unlikely Covid-19 vaccines will be required annually, like flu jabs, after individuals receive booster shots.

Dr Leong Hoe Nam, an infectious diseases consultant at Rophi Clinic in Mount Elizabeth Novena Specialist Centre, Singapore, said booster shots were able to develop high amounts of antibodies in the recipient.

"Within four to five days after receiving the booster shot, the recipient's body will develop high amounts of antibodies akin to a monoclonal antibody infusion. We believe this may be sufficient to block a Covid-19 infection.

"Furthermore, due to the an-

tibody affinity maturation phenomenon, the antibodies released are sharpshooters on their own, with a better targeting of the virus.

"Booster shots should also be administered through a stratified approach. Senior citizens with comorbidities should be the first to receive booster jabs to reduce hospitalisations and deaths," he said, during a virtual Covid-19 roundtable on Tuesday.

The "Living With Covid-19: A New Era with a Multi-Pronged Approach in Response to Covid-19" roundtable was organised by Roche Malaysia to highlight Covid-19 treatments as Malaysia gears towards treating the virus as endemic.

Dr Leong said treatments available could be broadly classified into two categories: antivirals and anti-inflammatory drugs.



A health worker drawing a syringe of Covid-19 vaccine to be administered as a booster dose at the Seberang Jaya Offsite Expo Grounds in Penang yesterday. PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

However, he said, the treatment used on a patient was determined by the infection phase.

"Monoclonal antibodies, for example, can be administered even before a person is exposed to the virus (pre-exposure prophylaxis stage) as well as on a close contact of an infected person (post-exposure prophylaxis stage).

"During the viral replication stage (between days five and seven), antiviral agents as well as monoclonal antibodies can be used for treatment.

"Steroids, along with Jak 1-2 inhibitors and IL-6 receptor blockers, can be used to treat patients, starting from the end of replication phase towards the inflammatory phase (day seven and above)," he said.

Dr Leong said, a Covid-19 patient would be assessed on several factors, such as gender, age,

comorbidities and type of vaccine received, among others, before the patient was treated with monoclonal antibodies.

He said Ronapreve, produced by Roche, was used as a treatment during post-exposure prophylaxis stage in some countries.

The Health Ministry, on Tuesday, granted conditional approval to Ronapreve for Covid-19 treatment in adults and adolescents aged 12 and older, weighing at least 40kg, who have been exposed or are at high risk of exposure to the virus.

Meanwhile, Dr Chua Hock Hin said vaccines alone were inadequate to mount effective antibody response in the most vulnerable of individuals.

This group, he said, comprised transplant recipients, people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow, non-cancer patients on

immunosuppression therapies and pregnant women with significant heart diseases, among others.

Dr Chua, an internal medicines and infectious diseases consultant at Sarawak General Hospital, said most vulnerable individuals, though vaccinated, might have reduced protection against newer Covid-19 variants.

"People in this group, therefore, require some form of therapeutics, such as antiviral medications and monoclonal antibody therapy, to reduce disease severity.

"Antiviral medications, for instance, prevent multiplication of the virus.

"Monoclonal antibodies are laboratory produced proteins that aim to reduce viral loads and lessen disease severity to prevent hospitalisation," he said.

TOUGHER PENALTIES

Khairy: Guidelines will ensure no 'cruel' fines

SRI AMAN: Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin yesterday gave an assurance that proposed changes to the law governing Malaysia's pandemic response will not lead to "cruel" punishments.

He urged critics of amendments to the Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease Act 1988 (Act 342) not to cripple his ministry's battle against Covid-19.

Khairy was asked to comment on the opposition's criticism that the proposed changes to the law were "excessive".

"We do not have any intention to turn the act into a punitive law (with the proposed amendments)

"Having said that, we must be

equipped with all sorts of 'weapons' in our battle against the pandemic," he said.

Khairy said all members of Parliament had been briefed on Monday that the ministry had prepared guidelines on how officers would determine the amount of fine to be issued.

"The guidelines will avoid incidences of people being slapped with fines deemed cruel.

"There is no way we will issue a RM10,000 compound against a person just because he or she failed to wear a face mask.

"The amount (RM10,000) is the maximum amount of compound that can be issued against individuals flouting the standard operating procedures (SOP)."



Khairy Jamaluddin

Khairy said a maximum fine would be issued only against organisations, such as companies, that repeatedly broke the rules, leading to the emergence of a Covid-19 cluster.

"These companies are making billions of ringgit every year," he said, adding that the existing act only allowed the ministry to issue RM1,000 compounds.

The amendments to the act were tabled in the Dewan Rakyat for a first reading on Tuesday.

The changes include a maximum RM1 million fine for organisations that break the rules and stiffer jail sentences.

INFECTIVITY RATE

National Rt at 0.93, while 6 states soar above 1.0

KUALA LUMPUR: The Covid-19 infectivity rate (Rt) in several states soared to above 1.0, exceeding the national Rt average of 0.93 as of Tuesday.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said Negri Sembilan had the highest Rt at 1.02, followed by Melaka and Pahang with 1.01 each.

"Perlis, Penang and Labuan have an Rt of 1, Johor, Kuala Lumpur and Terengganu at 0.98, and Selangor (0.97).

"Perak has 0.97, followed by Kelantan (0.96), Kedah (0.93), Perak (0.97), Putrajaya (0.87) and Sabah (0.86).

"Sarawak has the lowest Rt at 0.76 as of Dec 14," he said in a social media post yesterday.

On the number of daily cases, 3,900 new cases were detected as of noon yesterday. This is a slight dip from the 4,097 cases reported on Tuesday.

Dr Noor Hisham said this brought the national case tally to 2,703,140.



Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 3
RUANGAN : NATION

Support Bill to boost pandemic fight, MPs urged

SRI AMAN: Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin has urged all MPs to support the Bill to amend the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342) as the amendments can strengthen the government's arsenal in the fight against Covid-19.

Khairy had briefed MPs on Monday regarding the guidelines and conditions which needed to be fulfilled before the proposed higher penalty could be meted out for violation of Covid-19 prevention standard operating procedure.

The guidelines would protect the people from being slapped with unjust compounds for violating the SOP, he said.

"Surely, we are not going to issue a RM10,000 compound on someone for not wearing a face mask," he added.

According to Bernama, Khairy said the existing law was not effective in curbing the spread of Covid-19 as factories which contributed to clusters could only be fined a maximum of RM1,000 although their revenue might run into billions of ringgit.

"MPs should not block the amendments as this will cripple the Health Ministry."

"We are fine-tuning the guidelines and I have told all MPs, including from the Opposition, that I will bring the guidelines to the Select Committee," he said here yesterday.

Khairy also rejected the Opposition's claims that the proposed amendments were punitive in nature.

"We have guidelines to prevent abuse of power. I am appealing for the amendments to be passed at this sitting. If we wait until March next year, we don't know what will happen in the next two months with the emergence of Omicron and the like."

"Being punitive is the last resort as we need to have weapons to face this pandemic. We have done our bit with vaccination, early measures, SOP and control, but what about the question of fines?" he said.

Watch the video
TheStarTV.com



On track: Khairy (left) being briefed on the progress of the Sri Aman Hospital by Works Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof (centre) in Sri Aman, Sarawak. — ZULAZHAR SHEBLEE/The Star

Proposed new Covid-19 fines halved

But companies still find RM500,000 maximum penalty too high

By **MARTIN CARVALHO, RAHIM RAHIM and FATIMAH ZAINAL**
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KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry is lowering the proposed hefty fines on companies and individuals who breach Covid-19 standard operating procedure.

The decision to lower the fines comes in the wake of the outcry over the initial fines contained in the Bill tabled in Parliament on Tuesday to amend the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342).

Based on a document sighted by *The Star*, the Bill will be amended to lower the initially proposed maximum RM100,000 fine or seven years' jail under Section 24(a) to "RM50,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years" in the case of an individual.

Also tweaked is the proposed punishments under Section 25(b), which will be reduced from a fine not exceeding RM1mil for a corporate body to RM500,000.

Also lowered is the compound amount under Section 31(3) not exceeding RM20,000 or an imprisonment term not exceeding three years or both.

Under the present Act 342, the health authorities are only empowered to impose a maximum fine of RM1,000 against companies and individuals who flout Covid-19 SOP.

While stricter enforcement of Covid-19 SOP is a must amid the threat of new variants such as Omicron, some organisations say imposing a maximum compound of RM500,000 is still high and it can derail economic recovery.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said although the proposed fine had been halved, the figure was still high and the government should revert to the figures stipulated in the Emergency Ordinance, or withdraw the Bill and hold consultations with more stakeholders.

"This is not a game of figures. What's worse is that the government didn't provide any clear or transparent compound for each offence and it's very subjective."

"This could lead to misuse of power and corruption," he said, adding that the government should think of the survival of micro and small medium enterprises (MSMEs) as they were still struggling.

"Why penalise them?" he questioned.

Soh said the business fraternity was still reeling from the impact of the various lockdowns and most companies had yet to recuperate to a sustainable level.

The National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia president Datuk Low Kian Chuan said the lowered compound amount of RM500,000 was still steep for MSMEs and businesses.

Low added that compoundable offences for individuals could also be further lowered from the proposed RM50,000 to ease the burden on low- and middle-income households.

"The wealthy can easily pay the compound, but the low- and middle-income earners cannot afford it and will be put in jail," he said.

Amendments to the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342), if passed in Parliament this week, will see companies and organisations flouting Covid-19 SOP liable to a maximum fine of RM500,000 for compoundable offences.

However, business groups said this must be reviewed.

Small and Medium Enterprises Association of Malaysia (Samenta) chairman Datuk William Ng said

businesses were already struggling and based on their survey in September, SMEs were spending an average of RM90 monthly per employee just on SOP compliance.

"At a time when businesses, especially SMEs, are trying to recover from the prolonged lockdowns, the proposed maximum penalty is still excessive," said Ng.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) said the higher penalty proposed for companies and organisations breaching Covid-19 SOP was justified.

Its president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin had previously stated that the proposed maximum compound of RM1mil could be imposed on large companies that were repeat offenders and had triggered new Covid-19 clusters several times.

With the threat of new variants such as Omicron, employers were deeply concerned that it would derail business recovery and cause severe disruptions to the supply chain, he said.

"MEF is of the view that the proposed maximum compound of RM1mil on repeat offenders is justified as some offenders from large

companies did not take the earlier penalties imposed on them seriously."

"We believe that all these penalties are being introduced to protect the rakyat and the country."

"We hope this will also apply to repeat offenders in both private and public sectors."

"It is also important that the government issue clear guidelines so that minor offences are not heavily penalised and repeat offenders are imposed higher penalties," Syed Hussain said in a statement yesterday.

He added that the various past lockdowns had taught Malaysians a lesson on their adverse impact on the economy, triggering unemployment and affecting the mental health of the society.

"It is hoped that with the implementation of the enhanced SOP, booster shots and physical distancing, our economy will remain open and no more lockdowns will be imposed despite the possibility of a fourth wave."

"It is important that all stakeholders comply with the SOP and compliance can be better obtained by revising the penalty under existing legislation," he said.

AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 6

RUANGAN : NATION

'Maintain strict travel restrictions'

By ASHLEY TANG
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Experts also advise public to get booster jabs

PETALING JAYA: As more people in the world wake up to the possible danger posed by the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus, public health experts in Malaysia say strict travel restrictions should be maintained.

They also advised the public to take the booster shots as it is the best protection against the virus.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said the travel restriction list was needed for the time being as the impact of the Omicron variant on pandemic management and the healthcare system was still unknown.

"But, with more evidence on its actual magnitude of disease burden and impact on the healthcare system, we can review this," she said.

Currently, not much is known about the variant but so far milder infection is seen among the younger age groups.

However, how it affects those who are immuno compromised is not fully known.

"In my opinion, the current SOP to curb infections should be contin-

ued but we have to be cautious of the unknown features of the clinical impact towards the population.

"As such, wearing masks, physical distancing and hand hygiene must continue. We should never take it lightly. Continuous monitoring is also still needed," said Dr Malina.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the variant is now present in 77 countries.

It has also spread rapidly in the United Kingdom with the country recording its first death caused by the variant. Its Health Secretary had noted that the variant is expected to become the dominant strain by this week.

Singapore too has seen 16 cases of Omicron and believes that booster jabs will be a key part of its strategy against the new variant.

Thailand, meanwhile, has so far detected eight imported Omicron cases as it also races to strengthen its population's immunity.

Dr Malina pointed out that receiving the booster dose was also important as evidence had shown that waning antibodies were seen in

those fully vaccinated after three to six months.

"The booster dose will increase antibodies, therefore provides appropriate protection against possible new infection.

"While questions on whether vaccines are effective against Omicron are still being discussed, the booster dose implementation in Israel and Singapore has been proven to be effective at reducing cases and preventing severe manifestation and complications.

"With increased proportion coverage of booster doses and continuous SOP adherence, I think we would be able to curb the spread of Omicron in the country," she said.

On Nov 14, Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said on Twitter, that early data about Omicron showed increased transmissibility, unclear outcomes for hospitalisation and severe disease, as well as higher ability to evade antibody-mediated neutralisation.

He also said antibodies induced by natural SARS-CoV-2 infection

had largely failed to neutralise the Omicron variant, adding that evidence also suggested that a booster vaccine would likely offer protection against both Delta and Omicron variants.

The WHO's latest findings on Dec 8, found that the variant increases the risk of reinfection and it may also cause milder disease based on early data, although noting that more data is still needed before drawing firm conclusions.

WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Nov 14 cautioned the world not to take the variant lightly, noting that the variant is spreading at a rate not seen in other variants.

Universiti Malaya epidemiologist Prof Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud believed it was still too early to conclude that Omicron causes milder disease compared to the other variants.

He said updates by the UK Health Security Agency, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control still could not definitively state that

Omicron causes milder illness.

"At this point in time, we should keep travel restrictions as they are just to be on the safe side. Once we establish the epidemiological characteristics of the Omicron variant, we will be able to have a better picture of the situation.

"We are also still discovering more things about Omicron. Malaysia does not have a clear picture as we still have not done enough genome sequencing," he said, adding there was no data yet on the Omicron variant from the Health Ministry.

With Pfizer-BioNTech on Dec 8 noting that its vaccine appears to work against the Omicron variant, Dr Awang Bulgiba urged those who were eligible for booster jabs to take it for optimal protection.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah opined that pushing the panic button every time a new variant comes up was not the way forward.

He stressed that there could be more variants popping up in the next one to two years.

"We have to adhere to the SOP and getting the booster shot is the way forward," he said.