

AKHBAR : BERITA HARIAN

MUKA SURAT : 14

RUANGAN : NASIONAL

Penularan COVID-19

SOP lima kategori pengembara masuk Malaysia diperketat

Saringan lebih terperinci langkah cegah penularan varian Omicron

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Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) menetapkan tindakan pengukuhan kepada langkah pencegahan dan kawalan sedia ada ke atas pengembara yang tiba di Malaysia bagi lima kategori, berkuat kuasa hari ini.

Menteri Kesihatan, Khairy Jamaluddin, berkata ia membabitkan pengembara bagi Perjalanan Lengkap Vaksin (VTL) Udara dan Darat, Gelembung Pelancongan Antarabangsa Langkawi (LITB) serta Pusat Sejahtera (OSC) pelawat perniagaan jangka pendek masing-masing di Kategori 1, 2, 3 dan 4.

Selain itu, katanya, pengembara dari negara dikenakan sekatan perjalanan sementara dan melaporkan penularan varian membimbangkan (VOC) Omicron dalam komuniti, masing-masing di Kategori 5 dan 6.

Beliau berkata, penetapan itu dibuat bertujuan mencegah kemasukan dan penularan varian baharu COVID-19, Omicron ke negara ini.

"Bagi pengembara Kategori 1 hingga 4, tindakan pengukuhan kepada langkah pencegahan dan kawalan sedia ada adalah mereka mestilah sudah lengkap divaksinasi.

"Ujian *Real-Time Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction* (RT-PCR) COVID-19 dilakukan dalam masa dua hari sebelum berlepas ke Malaysia, menggantikan prosedur terdahulu yang menetapkan 72 jam sebelum berlepas.

"Ujian pengesanan COVID-19 semasa ketibaan di Malaysia, ujian Rapid Antigen (RTK-Ag) atau ujian pantas antigen (kendiri) pada hari kedua, keempat dan keenam selepas ketibaan.

"Ujian RTK-Ag atau ujian pantas antigen (professional) pada hari ketiga dan kelima selepas ketibaan dengan semua keputusan ujian perlu dilaporkan melalui aplikasi MySejahtera," katanya dalam satu kenyataan, semalam.

Sebanyak 43 negara melaporkan kes COVID-19 jangkitan varian baharu Omicron sehingga kelmarin dengan lapan daripadanya sudah dikenakan sekatan perjalanan sementara, mulai 27 November lalu, manakala lima lagi merekodkan penularan Omicron dalam komuniti.

Lima negara mencatatkan penularan Omicron dalam komuniti ialah United Kingdom (UK), Amerika Syarikat (AS), Australia, Perancis dan Norway.

Jumaat lalu, *BH* melaporkan, kes pertama VOC Omicron direkodkan di Malaysia, membabit-

kan seorang pelajar yang mempunyai rekod perjalanan dari Afrika Selatan yang sudah diarah menjalani kuarantin diri.

Khairy berkata, pengembara dari negara dikenakan sekatan perjalanan sementara, termasuklah warganegara dan pemegang pas lawatan jangka panjang perlu menjalani ujian RT-PCR COVID-19 dalam masa dua hari sebelum berlepas ke Malaysia.

Selain itu, pemakaian peranti pengesanan digital sepanjang tempoh kuarantin wajib selama 14 hari di stesen kuarantin tanpa mengira status vaksinasi, selain prosedur kuarantin dan pengujian semasa ketibaan dan sepanjang tempoh kuarantin adalah mengikut prosedur sedia ada.

"Pengembara dari negara melaporkan penularan varian Omicron dalam komuniti (kategori 6), termasuk warganegara dan bukan warganegara, ujian RT-PCR COVID-19 mesti dilakukan dalam dua hari sebelum ke Malaysia.

"Pemakaian peranti pengesanan digital sepanjang kuarantin wajib dengan tempoh kuarantin bergantung kepada status vaksinasi serta prosedur sedia ada diumumkan sebelum ini masih berkuat kuasa," katanya.

Sementara itu, sejumlah 4,965 kes baharu COVID-19 dilaporkan setakat jam 12 tengah semalam, berbanding 4,262 kes kelmarin.

Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan, Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, berkata peningkatan kes baharu itu menjadikan 2,667,999 individu dijangkiti virus itu.

AKHBAR : HARIAN METRO

MUKA SURAT : 6

RUANGAN : COVID-19

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Jasin

Hanya satu kluster membabitkan Pilihan Raya Negeri (PRN) Melaka dikesan dalam tempoh dua minggu selepas pilihan raya itu diadakan pada 20 November lalu.

Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Kesihatan dan Antidadah negeri Dr Muhamad Akmal Saleh berkata, penguatkuasaan prosedur operasi standard (SOP) yang dijalankan berjaya mengawal penularan Covid-19.

Beliau berkata, keadaan itu dapat dilihat apabila kadar kes merekodkan hanya 4.6 peratus peningkatan kes jangkitan Covid-19 sejak dua

Satu kluster PRN Melaka

Kadar kenaikan kes direkod 4.6 peratus selepas 2 minggu

70%
Kenaikan kes direkod dalam dua minggu ketika PRN Sabah

minggu lalu.

"Bagi PRN yang berlalu dua minggu sudah, kita ada beberapa kes yang berjaya di-

kawal melalui SOP dan kadar vaksinasi tinggi di Melaka.

"Kita berjaya kawal kadar jangkitan Covid-19 ketika PRN Melaka. Jika dibandingkan dengan PRN Sabah, 70 peratus kenaikan kes direkodkan dalam masa dua minggu di negeri itu berbanding hanya 4.6 peratus di Melaka," katanya kelmarin.

Beliau berkata, kluster Pu-

lau Gadong berkaitan PRN itu dikesan pada 21 November lalu membabitkan seorang tenaga pengajar sebuah sekolah yang terbabit dalam kempen pilihan raya.

"Dia kini dikuarantin manakala tempatnya bekerja ditutup sementara operasinya sehingga 18 Disember ini.

"Namun begitu tiada pengundi dikesan dijangkiti Covid-19 ketika mengundi di pusat mengundi seluruh Melaka," katanya.

Perarakan kavadi, chingay tidak dibenar tahun depan

Kuala Lumpur: Semua perarakan perayaan termasuk perarakan kavadi bagi perayaan Thaipusam dan chingay sempena Tahun Baharu Cina yang akan disambut tahun hadapan tidak dibenarkan.

Menteri Perpaduan Negara Datuk Halimah Mohamed Sadique berkata, ini berikutan ketika ini, negara berhadapan jangkitan varian baharu Covid-19 iaitu Omicron.

"Dalam permohonan sempena sambutan Thaipusam, perarakan itu tidak dibenarkan (kerana) kita berhadapan varian (Covid-19) yang baharu.

"...keduanya chingay, iaitu saya sudah sebut perarakan bagi sambutan Thaipusam tidak dibenar maka sudah tentu apa sahaja perarakan tidak dibenarkan dan itu bergantung kepada keputusan tiga jawatankuasa," katanya pada sesi Waktu Pertanyaan Menteri di Dewan Rakyat di sini, semalam.

Halimah menjawab soalan tambahan **Steven Choong Shiau Yoon (Bebas-Tebrau)** yang ingin mengetahui sama ada prosedur operasi stan-

dard (SOP) bagi Tahun Baharu Cina akan datang membenarkan perarakan chingay semasa sambutan perayaan itu.

Sementara itu, menjawab soalan asal **Sivakumar Varatharaju Naidu (PH-Batu Gajah)** yang ingin tahu SOP bagi sambutan Thaipusam pada 18 Januari Halimah berkata, cadangan SOP bagi perayaan termasuk sambutan Krismas tahun ini dijangka dibentangkan ke tiga mesyuarat jawatankuasa untuk kelulusan pada pertengahan Disember ini.

Beliau berkata, ia akan dibentangkan dalam Mesyuarat Kumpulan Kerja Teknikal Pengurusan Pandemik pada 13 Disember kemudian dibawa dalam Mesyuarat Kuartet Menteri pada 14 Disember, sebelum dibawa ke Mesyuarat Jawatankuasa Khas Pengurusan Pandemik yang dipengerusikan Perdana Menteri, yang dijangka pada 15 Disember.

"Setelah mendapat keputusan mesyuarat, surat makluman kelulusan SOP dihantar kepada pemimpin agama dan kenyataan media disediakan," katanya.

2,724,238 remaja lengkap divaksin

Kuala Lumpur: Seramai 2,724,238 individu atau 86.6 peratus populasi remaja berusia 12 hingga 17 tahun di negara ini lengkap menerima suntikan vaksin Covid-19, setakat 11.59 malam, kelmarin.

Berdasarkan data Kementerian Kesihatan menerusi laman COVIDNOW, seramai 2,832,379 individu atau 90 peratus golongan itu menerima sekurang-kurangnya satu dos vaksin.

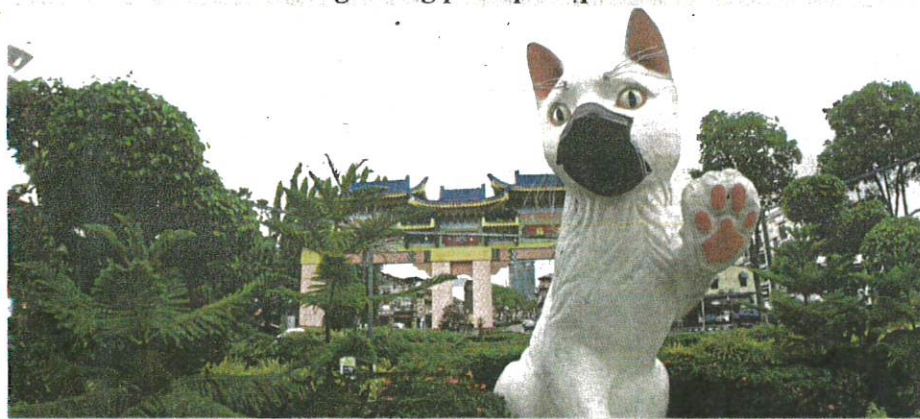
Bagi populasi dewasa pula, sebanyak 22,729,076 individu atau 97.1 peratus

telah melengkapkan vaksinasi manakala 23,054,211 atau 98.5 peratus menerima sekurang-kurangnya satu dos vaksin Covid-19.

Sementara itu, bagi vaksinasi harian 93,743 dos vaksin diberikan kelmarin membabitkan 4,722 dos pertama, 5,929 dos lengkap serta 87,074 dos penggalak.

Perkembangan itu menjadikan jumlah kumulatif pemberian vaksin bagi Program Imunisasi Covid-19 Kebangsaan kini meningkat kepada 54,197,452 dos.

Patung kucing pakai pelitup muka



PATUNG kucing dipakai pelitup muka menjadi perhatian di pekan Padungan, Kuching untuk memberi kesedaran kepada masyarakat bagi mematuhi prosedur operasi standard (SOP) bagi pencegahan Covid-19 yang ditetapkan pihak berkuasa ketika suasana Pilihan Raya Negeri (PRN) Sarawak ke-12, semalam.

Kota Bharu: Kelantan bercadang mengekalkan empat Pusat Kuarantin dan Rawatan Covid-19 Berisiko Rendah (PKRC) terus beroperasi di negeri ini.

Pengarah PKRC Kelantan, Dr Mohd Zurairie Mohd Zubir berkata empat, PKRC itu di Kota Bharu yang keseluruhan mampu memuatkan hampir 500 pesakit.

Katanya, PKRC itu adalah PKRC Tanjong Chat, Dewan Jubli Perak, Gelanggang Seni dan Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

"Di Kelantan walaupun

4 PKRC di Kelantan dikekalkan

PKRC banyak, namun ia berskala kecil dan mampu memuatkan lebih 100 pesakit.

"Justeru, berhubung cadangan Agensi Pengurusan Bencana Negara (Nadma) mahu mengekalkan satu PKRC di setiap negeri yang mampu memuatkan 500 pesakit, ia tidak dapat dilakukan dengan hanya satu

PKRC saja kerana kita tiada lokasi berskala besar.

"Jika mahu dikekalkan untuk kapasiti 500, kita cadang empat PKRC iaitu dua untuk pesakit perempuan manakala dua untuk pesakit lelaki," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian di sidang media selepas melawat PKRC di USM, di sini, semalam.

Terdahulu, Ketua Pengarah Nadma, Datuk Dr Aminuddin Hassim berkata, sekurang-kurangnya satu PKRC dengan kapasiti 500 dipatikan kekal beroperasi di setiap negeri.

Beliau berkata, kebanyakan premis dijadikan PKRC sebelum ini memohon namatkan perkhidmatan seperti institut latihan awam dan hotel bagi menjalankan operasi dan perniagaan seperti biasa.



DR Mohd Zurairie

AKHBAR : SINAR HARIAN
MUKA SURAT : 12
RUANGAN : VAKSIN UNTUK RAKYAT

Omicron: Jangan cepat panik

Rakyat Malaysia diminta bertenang dan teruskan SOP semasa bagi mencegah jangkitan Covid-19

KUALA LUMPUR

Ketika seluruh dunia termasuk Malaysia bertatih untuk kembali mengatur langkah selepas tersungkur dek bahana varian Delta yang mendominasi pandemik Covid-19, timbul pula perkhayaban tentang *strain* baharu yang mungkin lebih berbahaya.

Berita tidak enak itu mencetuskan kebimbangan akan kemungkinan perlu kembali hidup di bawah sekatan pergerakan, selain berlaku lonjakan kes yang menyebabkan kesesakan di hospital dan lebih banyak kematian, sedangkan rakyat baru sahaja menikmati sedikit kebebasan.

Ditambah pula Sarawak bakal menghadapi pilihan raya negeri yang tertangguh selama berbulan-bulan.

Dikesan oleh saintis di Afrika Selatan pada 24 November lalu, kemunculan varian Omicron membawa bersama pelbagai persoalan yang sehingga kini belum terjawab.

Penyelidik di Institut Penyelidikan Khazanah, Nazihah Muhammad Noor memberitahu, ada tiga perkara yang perlu diambil kira oleh pihak berkuasa dalam menepani Omicron.

"Kita perlu tunggu dan lihat

jika negara yang merekodkan kes Omicron turut mencatatkan peningkatan kes domestik, pertambahan kemasukan ke hospital dan kematian.

"Kita juga perlu tunggu dan lihat kesan *strain* baharu ini terhadap keberkesanan vaksin Covid-19 sedia ada," katanya.

Bagaimanapun pakar berpandangan hakikat Omicron diklasifikasikan oleh Pertubuhan Kesihatan Sedunia (WHO) sebagai varian membimbangkan (VoC) dalam tempoh yang begitu singkat sudah cukup membimbangkan.

Ketika laporan ini ditulis, Omicron dikesan di 38 negara termasuk Malaysia.

Malaysia melaporkan kes Omicron pertama pada 2 Disember lalu, iaitu seorang pelajar berusia 19 tahun yang kembali ke negara ini selepas pulang ke kampung halamannya di Afrika Selatan, namun sehingga kini tiada bukti menunjukkan berlaku jangkitan dalam komuniti.

Berdasarkan laporan berita, ada petunjuk Omicron sangat mudah berjangkit.

Di Afrika Selatan, jangkitan melonjak empat kali ganda pada minggu lepas, dari 4,373 kes pada 30 November kepada 16,055 pada 3 Disember.

Hanya sekitar 24 peratus daripada populasi di negara berkenaan lengkap dos vaksinasi, kebanyakannya adalah individu berusia 50 tahun ke atas.



Malaysia melaporkan kes Omicron pertama pada 2 Disember lepas.



NAZIHAH



DR SANDY

Pakar kesihatan bimbang kerana Omicron mempunyai lebih 50 mutasi dengan 30 daripadanya melibatkan *spike protein*. Sesetengah daripada mutasi itu pula meningkatkan kadar transmisi (kebolehpindahan).

Ahli virologi dan pakar biologi molekul University of Nottingham-Malaysia, Profesor Dr Sandy Loh Hwei San berkata, proses mutasi berkemungkinan menyebabkan varian itu lebih mudah berjangkit.

"Apa yang kita dapat lihat di Afrika Selatan ialah kes meningkat secara mendadak, justeru

ada kemungkinan varian ini sangat mudah berjangkiti berbanding Delta," jelasnya.

Menurutnya, sebahagian daripada pakar menjangka kadar transmisi Omicron kira-kira lima kali ganda lebih tinggi berbanding *strain* asal.

Negara-negara lain juga menunjukkan tanda-tanda serupa.

Di Norway, sekurang-kurangnya 13 orang dijangkiti Omicron selepas menghadiri sambutan Krismas pada 26 November lepas.

Di United Kingdom, jumlah kes meningkat sebanyak 50 peratus dalam tempoh 24 jam, iaitu dari 160 kes pada 4 Disember kepada 246 pada hari berikutnya.

Kebarangkalian *strain* itu mampu melepasi imuniti yang terhasil daripada vaksin seterusnya menjangkiti orang lain, terus meningkat. Contohnya, semua yang dikesan dijangkiti Omicron dalam kluster resto-

ran di Norway itu lengkap divaksinasi serta diuji negatif Covid-19 sebelum menghadiri jamuan berkenaan.

Negara lain juga melaporkan jangkitan dalam kalangan individu lengkap dos vaksinasi. Kes pertama Omicron di Malaysia, iaitu pelajar dari Afrika Selatan itu juga lengkap vaksinasinya.

WHO menyarankan semua negara mengambil langkah memperkukuh sistem pemantauan termasuk pemantauan genom dan sistem pelaporan.

Badan dunia itu juga menasihati semua negara dan orang awam agar terus patuh kepada langkah-langkah pencegahan.

Paling penting ialah vaksin dan dos penggalak, diikuti langkah farma-seutikal merawat Covid-19 dan langkah bukan far-

maseutikal, antaranya pemakaian pelitup muka, menambah baik aliran pengudaraan serta penjarakan fizikal. - Bernama

MENDEPANI KRISIS COVID-19: APA TINDAKAN KITA?

Sinovac dijual kepada penerima dos penggalak

SHAH ALAM - ProtectHealth Corporation Sdn Bhd (ProtectHealth) memaklumkan vaksin jenis Sinovac dijual secara terus kepada penerima dos penggalak di Pusat Pemberian Vaksin (PPV) fasiliti kesihatan swasta.

ProtectHealth dalam kenyataan berkata, penjualan tersebut melibatkan sebilangan PPV di bawah Program Imunisasi Covid-19 Kebangsaan (PICK).

Bagaimanapun, penyedia perkhidmatan pemberian vaksin itu berkata, penjualan vaksin dilakukan di PPV fasiliti kesihatan swasta tidak terletak di bawah program PICK yang dikawal selia ProtectHealth.

"Fasiliti kesihatan swasta yang menjalankan pemberian Sinovac melalui PICK dan program pembelian vaksin atau *private purchase vaccine* perlu mengutamakan pemberian vaksin di

bawah PICK secara percuma terlebih dahulu sebelum menawarkannya secara pembelian.

"PPV juga dinasihatkan untuk memaklumkan kepada penerima dos penggalak akan ketersediaan vaksin Sinovac di bawah PICK dan menjelaskan kepada mereka yang program pembelian di fasiliti kesihatan swasta tidak ditanggung kerajaan," menurut kenyataan itu.

ProtectHealth menegaskan, kesemua jenis vaksin di bawah PICK adalah percuma dan ditanggung kerajaan termasuk vaksin Sinovac yang ditawarkan PPV fasiliti kesihatan swasta dan PPV *off-site* di bawah seliaan ProtectHealth.

"Sehubungan itu, penerima yang ingin mendapatkan Sinovac sebagai dos penggalak diminta bertanya kepada PPV fasiliti kesihatan swasta terlebih dahulu sama ada ia menawarkan vaksin Sinovac melalui PICK atau tidak," jelasnya.

Laporan media perolehan vaksin tidak tepat

SHAH ALAM - Menteri Kesihatan, Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar menjelaskan laporan media yang memetik kenyataan Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin bahawa negara membelanjakan lebih RM2 bilion daripada peruntukan keseluruhan RM3 bilion untuk membeli vaksin bagi 30 peratus rakyat adalah tidak tepat.

Sebaliknya, jelas Khairy, bekas Perdana Menteri itu tidak pernah mengeluarkan kenyataan tersebut.

"Setelah pejabat saya memperoleh transkrip penuh ucapan Tan Sri Muhyiddin, ternyata beliau tidak pernah me-

ngeluarkan kenyataan sebegini dan ia laporan yang tidak tepat.

"Bagaimanapun kesilapan laporan berkenaan tidak diperbetulkan dan boleh diakses sehingga ke hari ini (Selasa). Saya juga ingin mengingatkan para pengamal berita untuk lebih berhati-hati dalam laporan mereka," katanya dalam satu kenyataan pada Selasa.

Beliau berkata demikian merujuk kepada laporan berita pada 1 Disember berhubung kenyataannya kepada Jawatankuasa Kira-Kira Wang Negara (PAC) pada Januari lalu mengenai perolehan vaksin Covid-19.

AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES
 MUKA SURAT : 6
 RUANGAN : NEWS / STORY OF THE DAY

6 | NEWS / Story of the day

TO BENEFIT 3.6 MILLION HOUSEHOLDS

CARE PACKS FOR B40 TO STAY COVID SAFE

Each box contains masks, oximeter, thermometer and test kits, says Khairy in unboxing video on TikTok

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WITH the Covid-19 infectivity rate inching towards 1.0 again, steps are being taken to distribute care packages containing pulse oximeters, Antigen Rapid Test Kits, face masks and pamphlets to all B40 households.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin yesterday unveiled the Keluarga Malaysia Covid-19 care package in a special unboxing video on his official TikTok account.

He said each box contained a pulse oximeter, thermometer,

brochure about the package, four reusable face masks and four saliva RTK-Antigen self-test kits.

"Use the self-test kit when you show symptoms, wear the face masks when you are out, check your temperature and blood oxygen level when you feel unwell to make sure we are always in good health," he said in the video lasting one minute and 14 seconds.

The effort to distribute the Keluarga Malaysia Covid-19 care package had been announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob on Sept 19.

It is expected to benefit about 3.6 million B40 households in preparation for the Covid-19 endemic phase.

Ismail Sabri had said that the care package aid was made possible due to an allocation of more than RM471.6 million.

He had previously said the aim, among others, was to ease the financial burden of B40 households and prepare them towards new normal practices as well as helping to protect their families from Covid-19 infection.

He had also said the care packages would first be distributed to recipients of Bantuan Prihatin

Rakyat (BPR) who are married.

"They comprise those who are married with or without children or single parents with children," he said, adding that, to date, there were 8.4 million BPR recipients.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 infectivity rate, or Rt, nationwide continued with an upward trend and stood at 0.99 on Monday.

In revealing the latest data, Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah shared on social media that Perlis had the highest Rt at 1.13 and was the only state with an Rt above 1.0.

Based on data at the Health Ministry's CovidNow portal, hospitalisation rates had been reduced by four per cent in the past seven days. However, the utilisation rate increased in five states in the same period. The five states are Pahang, Perlis, Terengganu, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

Malaysia recorded 4,956 new Covid-19 infections in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Dr Noor Hisham said in a tweet that with the latest cases, the overall number of cases in the country now stood



A screenshot of Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin showing the Keluarga Malaysia Covid-19 care package in a special unboxing video on his official TikTok account yesterday.

at 2,667,999.

On Monday, another 38 Covid-19 deaths were recorded in Malaysia, including eight brought-in-dead (BID) cases, raising the toll to 30,652.

Selangor reported six fatalities

and was the highest among all states, followed by Perak (five); Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kuala Lumpur (four each); Pahang and Sabah (three each); Melaka (two); Johor, Negri Sembilan and Sarawak (one each).

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 6
RUANGAN : NATION

Over 50 S'gor students left orphaned due to Covid-19

SHAH ALAM: Fifty-five students in Selangor became orphans after losing their parents or guardians to Covid-19 from January 2020 to September this year, says Selangor executive councillor Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud.

Based on statistics from the Selangor State Education Department, a total of 1,648 students in the state lost at least one parent due to the pandemic during the same period, added the state public health, unity, and women and family development committee chairman at the Selangor state assembly yesterday.

The three districts that recorded the highest number of orphans were Hulu Langat, Klang and Petaling Perdana, Bernama quoted her as saying.

Siti Mariah was replying Lim Yi Wei (PH-Kampung Tunku), who wanted to know the number of orphans in Selangor due to the coronavirus from January 2020 to September 2021.

Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff two months ago said the government identified 4,696 children orphaned due to Covid-19 as at September.

The ministry had taken measures to ensure their welfare and education were taken care of, she said.

Meanwhile, Selangor standing committee on non-Islamic affairs co-chairman V. Ganabathirai said the state government will coordinate the assistance for the Kasih Ibu Smart Selangor Ibu Tunggal (KISS-IT) initiative so that single mothers would benefit.

The latest data as at October recorded 1,661 individuals receiving the benefits compared to the quota of 5,000 allocated.

"The programme will be upgraded to the Bantuan Kehidupan Sejahtera Selangor (Bingkas) in the state Budget 2022," he said in reply to Harumaini Omar (Pejuang-Batang Kali) who queried the allocated quota.

Six days of Covid-19 testing for select travellers

KUALA LUMPUR: International and local travellers for the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) by air and land, Langkawi International Travel Bubble (LITB) and One Stop Centre (OSC) for short-term business visitors will have to undergo Covid-19 test for six days after arriving in Malaysia.

Health Minister, Khairy Jamaluddin said the requirement would take effect tomorrow and was a move to strengthen the Ministry of Health (MOH)'s existing precautionary and control measures to prevent the transmission and spread of the Omicron variant in the country.

"Travellers under these categories must undergo Covid-19 detection test upon arrival in Malaysia, RTK-Ag test or Rapid Antigen Test (self-test) on the second, fourth and sixth day after arrival.

"They would also need to undergo a professional RTK-Ag test on the third and fifth day after arriving. In addition, LITB travellers must



Strengthening measures: Travellers from abroad that fall under certain categories will be required to undergo more tests. — Bernama

undergo an RT-PCR test at least 48 hours earlier before leaving Langkawi island.

"All test results must be reported through the MySejahtera application," he said in a statement.

Khairy, reported Bernama, said those travellers must also ensure

that they are fully vaccinated and must undergo RT-PCR tests at least 48 hours prior to their travel dates, replacing the previous procedure set 72 hours before departure.

Meanwhile, he said travellers from five countries with reported cases of Omicron in the community,

namely the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, France and Norway, will be required to get tested with an RT-PCR swab test 48 hours before departing to Malaysia.

He added that they, too, would be required to use a digital tracking device on them at all times during their mandatory quarantine period.

Khairy said travellers (Malaysian citizens and long-term visit pass holders) arriving from the temporary travel ban in eight countries must also use a digital tracking device at the designated isolation centres during their 14-day mandatory quarantine period.

According to him, the preventive measures will be reviewed from time to time.

As of yesterday, 43 countries have reported Omicron-related cases.

On Nov 27, Malaysia has listed eight countries on temporary travel restrictions, namely, South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 8
RUANGAN : NATION

Free Sinovac booster jabs for Selangor residents starting today

By SHALINI RAVINDRAN
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SHAH ALAM: The Selangor government is offering free Sinovac booster jabs to state residents starting today, regardless of whether or not they were previously recipients under the Selvax programme.

According to Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari, some 157,000 Sinovac booster doses had been allocated for the first phase under the state's government's Selvax vaccination programme for those who had completed their first two Covid-19 vaccine doses.

"Those who are above the age of 18 and have completed their first two doses of a

Covid-19 vaccine will be able to walk in to any of the participating Selcare clinics to receive their booster shots, or they can make an appointment using the Selangkah app."

Amirudin said.

"It is open to anyone who is eligible to get the booster vaccine, especially senior citizens and those with comorbidities. They need not be recipients under the earlier Selvax programme.

"The details of those who have received the booster doses will also be updated in their MySejahtera app," he added.

The full list of participating Selcare clinics is available at <https://selcareclinic.com/our-clinics>.

Amirudin added that the Selvax Booster Programme was meant to complement the federal government's efforts to encourage the public to get their booster shots as soon as possible.

"This is part of the state's preparedness against a potential new wave of infections from the Omicron variant.

"We will also roll out the booster programme on-site, the details of which will be announced soon as we need to ensure that proper standard operating procedures are in place," he said.

He also announced that the state executive council (MMKN) had approved an allocation of RM10.7mil to manage and improve Covid-19 Clinical Assessment Centres in the state.

Selangor's home quarantine monitoring through the Selangkah app would also be expanded to the entire state, Amirudin added.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
 MUKA SURAT : 14
 RUANGAN : NATION

Omicron – Should I be worried?

The latest SARS-CoV-2 viral variant is causing concern worldwide



TELL ME ABOUT
 DR. Y. L. M

THERE has been a lot of news about the new Omicron viral variant. What exactly is it?

The Omicron viral variant has recently been named by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

It is a new SARS-CoV-2 virus variant that is potentially more transmissible and has been classified as a variant of concern.

Right now, we do not know how much of a concern it should be.

We do not know how much more contagious it is compared to the Delta variant (which is more than twice as contagious as other SARS-CoV-2 viral variants).

At the time of writing, we do not know if the vaccines we currently have are effective against it.

And we do not know if it can cause more severe disease compared to previous variants.

What we do know is that there will likely be many more variants of concern developing in the world throughout our lives, and medical science has to keep on evolving to combat it, e.g. by modifying the current Covid-19 vaccines and discovering new drugs to treat the infection – just like we did for influenza.

Where did the Omicron variant come from?

The Omicron variant was first identified in South Africa on Nov 9 and reported to the WHO on Nov 24.

However, it has been reported that Dutch scientists have detected this variant in samples collected before. The reason it became of concern was because South Africa is seeing a large spike in Covid-19 cases due to this variant.

Why is it called Omicron?

The WHO started to name variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus according to the Greek alphabet to make them easy to say and remember.

So far, it has been according to the Greek alphabetical order, i.e. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and so



Variant of concern: Genome sequencing has found that the Omicron viral variant has already landed in dozens of countries around the world. – Bloomberg

on up to Mu.

But this time, the WHO decided to jump two letters in the Greek alphabet to "avoid stigma" towards a certain region. Omicron's real viral name is B.1.1.529.

It is a variant of concern because it has many mutations, particularly on the spike protein of the virus that many vaccines are based on, and has been responsible for a significant rise in Covid-19 cases.

At the time of writing, it has been identified in 38 countries worldwide, including Malaysia.

Is the Omicron variant more infective than the Delta variant?

Scientists are still studying this. The Omicron variant has more than 30 mutations in the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

So, scientists are concerned that having so many mutations would make the variant attach more easily to human cells without being

neutralised by our antibodies, which would have been formed due to our vaccinations and/or having had Covid-19 before.

However, this is just a theory and has yet to be borne out in real-world evidence.

Will my Covid-19 vaccine protect against this variant?

The Omicron viral variant spread very quickly in South Africa, becoming the dominant variant in a matter of days, rather than weeks or months.

When we say a variant is dominant, it means that that particular variant has become the main variant spreading in a certain region, compared to other viral variants, even Delta.

Some vaccine manufacturers like Moderna say that they are rapidly working to test their vaccines against the Omicron variant. They will release the data within several weeks.

They are also testing an

Omicron-specific vaccine booster shot.

How we approach the situation caused by the Omicron variant is no different than the biannual modification of vaccines against the influenza virus.

The influenza virus also mutates very quickly, and we need a yearly flu vaccine shot to neutralise the new variants.

British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca is also testing its vaccine against the variant, as well as its new antibody treatment for Covid-19.

German biotechnology company BioNTech, which developed the first approved Covid-19 mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) vaccine, is doing similar research, as is the American corporation Johnson and Johnson.

What are the symptoms caused by this new Omicron variant? Are they worse than the Delta variant? Frankly, I've had

quite enough with two years of movement restrictions, and I don't want to go through it any more!

The South African doctor, Angelique Coetzee, who first studied the Omicron variant and its effect on patients, said that the symptoms were unusual, but mild in healthy patients.

The symptoms she observed were sore muscles and tiredness for a day or two.

The patients had a slight cough, but nothing else prominent.

They did not suffer from loss of smell or taste, unlike the other variants where those are common symptoms.

They got better very quickly, however.

A six-year-old girl was also among the patients she looked at.

This girl presented with a fever and a very high pulse rate, but got better after two days.

So far, it sounds like any other viral illness as none of these symptoms are particularly unique.

However, it should be noted that all the patients were healthy, and the worry is always about the elderly, those with other diseases (co-morbidities) and the otherwise infirmed, just like it is with any infectious disease, including those caused by the original and Delta variants.

Dr YLM graduated as a medical doctor, and has been writing for many years on various subjects such as medicine, health, computers and entertainment. For further information, email starhealth@thestar.com.my. The information provided is for educational and communication purposes only, and it should not be construed as personal medical advice. Neither The Star nor the author gives any warranty on accuracy, completeness, functionality, usefulness or other assurances as to such information. The Star and the author disclaim all responsibility for any losses, damage to property or personal injury suffered directly or indirectly from reliance on such information.

AKHBAR : THE SUN ON WEDNESDAY

MUKA SURAT : 4

RUANGAN : NEWS WITHOUT BORDERS

Emergence of Omicron sparks fear

► New variant raises concern over possible lockdowns and more deaths after spreading quickly to at least 38 countries

KUALA LUMPUR: As the world begins to recover from the effects of Covid-19's Delta variant, news of a possibly more contagious strain is sparking fears of new lockdowns, overloaded hospitals and more deaths.

It is especially worrying as Malaysia returns to some semblance of normalcy, including preparing for a state election in Sarawak.

Detected by scientists in South Africa on Nov 24, there are many questions about it but no quick answers.

Khazanah Research Institute researcher Nazifah Muhamad Noor told Bernama there are three things to look out for.

"We will have to wait and see if countries where Omicron has been detected experience a subsequent spike in local cases and whether there is a rise in hospitalisations and deaths.

"We will also have to wait to see whether it has any effect on the effectiveness of existing Covid-19 vaccines," she said.

However, experts say the fact that it took such a short time from detection to receive Variant of Concern (VoC) classification from the World Health Organisation is concerning.

To date, the strain has been reported in at least 38 countries, including Malaysia.

While Malaysia reported its first Omicron case on Dec 2 - involving a returning 19-year-old student who had gone home to South Africa to see her family - there is no evidence community transmission is occurring thus far.

Health experts are concerned because Omicron has more than 50 mutations, 30 of which are on the spike protein. Some of the mutations also increase transmissibility.

University of Nottingham-Malaysia virologist and molecular biologist Prof Dr Sandy Loh Hwei San said the mutations are possibly making the variant more infectious.

"What we can see based on South Africa, cases are suddenly increasing very sharply, exponentially, so there is a chance for it to be more highly transmissible than Delta," she said.

She added some experts have estimated the transmission rate to be about five times the infectiousness of the original strain.

But while the record number of mutations have indicated higher transmission, there is no evidence whether it translates to a more severe infection.

So far, no deaths have been reported from Omicron and early reports indicate it might be less severe than Delta.

Loh said just because a virus has many mutations, they do not necessarily combine to make a more deadly one.

In other words, the mutations may cancel each other out or be dormant.

"(RNA) virus mutate very frequently. But whether they can increase the virulence or severe symptoms, this might not be the case," she said.

Epidemiologist Prof Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud said the number of mutations on the variant is unusually high and seems to

combine mutations seen in a few other VoCs.

"Several of these mutations have been simulated in the laboratory before, and those mutations have shown a very high possibility of immune escape from antibodies in recovered patients and vaccinated persons," he said.

Scientists worldwide are now trying to test the vaccines' efficacy against the variant, with results expected in a few weeks.

Health experts hope the new variant will push the unvaccinated into getting their shots and those who have gotten two doses to get their booster shot.

Experts say Covid-19 self-test kits, which only detect a positive or negative result, do not detect the presence of Omicron.

Loh said it may be important to identify Omicron cases, in case the VoC proves deadlier than Delta or to prevent it from spreading.

"If the virus' transmissibility period is proven to be longer than other Covid-19 variants, this may require a longer quarantine period.

"Hence, a rapid test can also be very helpful."

Omicron can only be confirmed by genomic sequencing, but a reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction test can also indicate whether someone is infected with the variant. A Singapore company has produced two tests that can detect Delta and Omicron.