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A Health Ministry worker at a Covid-19 Low-Risk Quarantine and Treatment Centre at the Malaysia Agro Exposition Park Serdang in February. Experts say the country's high vaccination coverage should be able to protect most people. FILE PIC



Associate Professor
Dr Malina Osman



Professor Datuk
Dr N.K.S.
Tharmaseelan

HIGH VACCINATION RATE

EXPERTS: FOCUS ON LONG COVID, VIRUS STUDIES

They say new waves will come and go, unlikely to affect transition to endemic phase

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WHILE the country's Covid-19 infections continue to see upward and downward trends, authorities should continue focusing on long Covid treatments and relevant studies on the virus.

Epidemiologist and biostatistician Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman of Universiti Putra Malaysia said apart from post-Covid healthcare, relevant studies on vaccines, as well as patient and close contact navigation systems (the use of electronic bracelets) should continue.

"I (also) hope improvements for HIDE, or Hotspot Identification for Dynamic Engagement, and the study on negative pressure ambulance (on containment of Covid-19) introduced during the pandemic will continue as well," she said.

On the possibility of a new wave of Covid-19, Dr Malina said it would be "almost similar to the Omicron wave early this year".

"Even if the numbers increase,

most of them are less serious cases as majority of the people have been vaccinated against the virus," she said.

More than four million Covid-19 infections have been recorded in Malaysia, which means about 12 per cent of the 32 million population here have been infected with the virus.

At least 10,000 recovered patients had received treatment for long Covid at the Health Ministry's rehabilitation centres, including in-patient treatments.

The ministry regularly advises recovered Covid patients to seek medical attention should they experience shortness of breath, fatigue, cough and muscle pain.

While most Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted, Dr Malina said the public should continue to exercise caution.

For those who had yet to get the full dosage of the Covid-19 vaccine or the booster shot, she urged them to get the shots at the designated centres.

She said the possible new Covid wave would unlikely affect the country's transition from the pandemic to endemic phase, thanks to the high vaccination coverage that should be able to protect most people.

Former Malaysian Medical Association president Professor Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan said like dengue, malaria and influenza, the Covid-19 wave might come and go.

The Health Ministry's statistics revealed that there was a 40 per

cent increase in dengue cases in

the same period last year, he said. Just in the last week of April this year, Malaysia logged 1,021 dengue cases. The disease is endemic in more than 100 countries.

"This is despite the fact dengue has been around for decades. Covid-19, however, is a new infection which we have yet to fully know its mutation prospects and treatment.

"So, it will be here for some time, probably a long time."

He said spikes and slumps in the infection trend would continue just like any other endemic diseases.

Dr Tharmaseelan echoed similar views that the country's high vaccination rate would cushion the severity of symptoms if there was a spike in cases.

"Even 30 per cent of the children have been vaccinated against Covid.

"The majority of Malaysians have adopted the government's standard operating procedures for Covid-19 as a way of life."

He said the transition to the endemic phase was slowly taking shape and after some time, Malaysians would have to accept that Covid-19 would be here to stay.

Dr Tharmaseelan said high-risk groups, children, senior citizens and those with comorbidities should be monitored more closely and encouraged to take their fourth vaccine dose to boost protection against the virus.

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INCREASE OF 504 COVID-19 CASES FROM TUESDAY

Selangor, KL, Penang top list for 3 days

KUALA LUMPUR: Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Penang, for the third day in a row, recorded the highest number of new Covid-19 cases nationwide.

On Wednesday, Selangor reported 1,055 fresh infections. There were 515 new infections in Kuala Lumpur and 148 in Penang.

The cases made up the majority of 2,425 new infections reported to the Health Ministry. It marked a jump of 504 cases from Tuesday's 1,921. The nation's cumulative caseload now stood at 4,547,051 since the pandemic began in 2020.

Of the 2,425 cases, only eight

were infected abroad. There were 1,550 recoveries while four deaths were reported, of which, one was brought-in-dead.

Active cases amounted to 27,026, of which 25,972 were home quarantined; 1,020 hospitalised and four at quarantine and low-risk treatment centres.

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5,590 people in Penang given second booster shot

By N. TRISHA
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GEORGE TOWN: A total of 5,590 people in Penang has taken the second Covid-19 booster dose, making the state the sixth state with the highest number of recipients in the country.

Penang is behind Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Sarawak and Perak for the second booster dose administered.

Nationwide, 112,365 people have taken the second booster dose.

This is the fourth Covid-19 vaccine jab for Malaysians, after the first two doses and first booster.

Penang health committee chairman Dr Norlela Ariffin said the booster dose for the 5,590 people were administered from May until Tuesday.

"It is not compulsory to take the second booster, but it is usually recommended by doctors when their patients have pre-existing



health conditions," she said.

Dr Norlela hoped that the administration of the second booster will offer protection to the people following warnings of another wave

of Covid-19 infections.

Three categories of people are eligible for the second booster - senior citizens aged 60 and above; those with high-risk comorbidities; and adults aged 18 and above who are travelling overseas, which is a requirement by the destination country.

A check at the government health clinic in Ayer Itam on Wednesday showed a steady stream of children and adults waiting for vaccination, including second booster shots.

Clinic matron Norli Zainal said adults must call and provide their names and personal details to make an appointment for the dose.

"There are six vials in a set and when we open it, the rest will go to waste if we do not finish the set.

"We usually gather a group of six before we call them to come get the dose.

"We set the date and have them come in for the shot and this includes those who want their first or second booster shots.

"We do not want to waste the vaccine," she

said when met at the clinic.

Norli said there were not as many people now as before because most people have been vaccinated and booster shots are optional.

"Usually, those who come for the second booster are those who were told by their doctors to do so.

"So far this month, we have given out 18 doses to adults, which includes the first and second booster doses.

"We started giving out the second booster shots in May.

"There are still people who are registering for their first booster," she added.

According to Norli, the health clinic only gives out Pfizer here.

Earlier, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin cautioned Malaysians to brace for a possible new Covid-19 wave in the next few months.

He said that the new wave of infection could happen based on the virus epidemiology development in other countries.

KJ: Take second boosters

'New Covid-19 wave may emerge sooner than forecast'

By SARBAN SINGH
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REMBAU: Senior citizens and individuals with chronic illnesses have been reminded to take their second Covid-19 booster shots as a potential new Covid-19 infection wave may emerge sooner than forecast, says the Health Minister.

Khairy Jamaluddin said this was based on the number of cases reported in recent days both here and across the Causeway.

"Over the past two to three days we have been reporting more than 2,000 cases a day against 1,000 and 2,000 previously.

"Today (Thursday), we have 2,796 cases with two new clusters reported at institutions of higher learning.

"So if we are not cautious, the cases will keep on increasing in the coming weeks," he told reporters after officially opening the otorhinolaryngology centre and sleep lab at Hospital Rembau.

On Tuesday, Khairy said Covid-19 cases would fluctuate and a potential new infection wave might emerge in the next few months, despite the current situation being under control.

He said Malaysians ought to know the latest developments so that they can take preventive measures against contracting the virus.

"This is more of a preventive measure so that we are ready and not to scare anyone. In fact, other nations have faced a similar situation," he said.

Khairy said what was important was that the new wave was not as contagious and that the number of deaths and admissions into intensive care units remained low.

He said all states except Selangor, Johor, Kedah and Terengganu have reported an increase in the number of cases compared with the previous day while two new higher



Young patients: Khairy visiting a ward for children with hearing problems after officially opening the otorhinolaryngology centre and sleep lab at Hospital Rembau. - Bernama

education clusters have also been reported.

"It is also my hope that those above 60 and those with chronic illnesses will take the second booster shot as this is the best way to keep them safe," he said.

As of June 20, almost 108,000 individuals aged 12 years and above have received their second Covid-19 booster jabs. About 58,000 were aged above 60.

Khairy said he was also closely following the Covid-19 situation in Singapore.

"I have to do so because Malaysia and Singapore are in the same epidemiological area with no travel restrictions and hundreds of thousands crossing the Causeway daily.

"My Singapore counterpart has also told me that the republic has been seeing more BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants which were more transmissible than earlier variants," he said, adding that these variants, however, had the same effect as other Omicron variants.

Beware of Omicron subvariants, Sarawakians told

By SHARON LING
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KUCHING: Sarawakians have been urged to be on alert and to get their booster shots after six cases of the highly infectious Covid-19 Omicron subvariants were detected.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak's Institute of Health and Community Medicine (IHCM) director Prof Dr David Perera said the first incidences of the BA.2.12.1 and BA.5 subvariants were detected from a case in Kuching and Sibul respectively in the last week of May.

"Subsequently, an additional case of BA.2.12.1 and three cases of BA.5 were detected in Kuching in the second and third weeks of June," he said in a statement yesterday.

Dr Perera said the subvariants were detected from the sequencing of 1,229 samples from positive cases statewide from March 1 to June 16.

He said all the sequenced samples were detected to be of the Omicron variant and subvariants.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has flagged the BA.2.12.1 and BA.5 subvariants as highly infectious with faster transmission rates than the parent Omicron variant.

Dr Perera noted that BA.2.12.1, first detected in the United States, continued to be the dominant driver of infections there, while BA.5 had caused a recent increase in Covid-19 cases in multiple countries.

In this respect, he urged the public in Sarawak to be aware of the heightened risk of infections in the state.

"They are strongly advised to get their booster shot if they have not done so, particularly for individuals with comorbidities and those above 60 years old," he added.

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Plans underway to build new hospital in Kempas

By YEE XIANG YUN
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ISKANDAR PUTERI: Johor is likely to get a new hospital in Kempas soon to complement existing government medical facilities.

The Johor Health Department, with the support of the Health Ministry, is in the process of getting the Hospital Sultanah Aminah 2 project included in the upcoming federal budget, according to Johor health and unity committee chairman Ling Tian Soon.

Ling, in his winding up speech during the state assembly sitting, said the state had made the mega project its main priority and a 207.5ha plot in Kempas had been identified for the hospital.

"A budget of RM500mil was required to build the hospital, which also comprised specialist clinics, staff quarters and the department's office.

"We plan to build the hospital with a capacity of 350 beds and specialist clinics in the first phase once it is approved," he said when met outside the state assembly in Kota Iskandar here yesterday.

Ling added the Health Ministry had paid for the land premium and the state government was working with local authorities to vacate the proposed land as it is currently occupied by squatters.

"Once the project is successfully included into the 12th Malaysia Plan and the land issues are resolved, we hope to begin the tender process next year in order to start con-

struction as early as 2024.

"A hospital typically takes about three years to complete," he said, adding the proposed hospital would be a good addition to the existing medical facilities including Hospital Pasir Gudang, which was on track for completion in 2024.

On the existing Hospital Sultanah Aminah in Johor Baru, Ling said the general hospital would be upgraded and work included building a new polyclinic building to replace the old one as well as to upgrade its parking facility.

Ling also advised parents of five-year-olds who missed out on the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme for Children (PICKids) to register their children via the MySejahtera app.

"We plan to build the hospital with a capacity of 350 beds and specialist clinics in the first phase once it is approved."

Ling Tian Soon

AKHBAR : THE SUN

MUKA SURAT : 4

RUANGAN : NEWS WITHOUT BORDERS

Highly infectious Omicron variants detected in Sarawak

KUCHING: Cases of the highly infectious Covid-19 Omicron variants, namely the BA.2.12.1 and BA.5, have been detected in Sarawak recently.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Institute of Health and Community Medicine director Prof Dr David Perera said this in his report to State Disaster Management Committee chairman Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas yesterday.

Perera said 1,229 samples of positive cases were successfully sequenced from March 1 to June 16.

"All were detected as the Omicron variant of concern. These samples represented positive cases obtained statewide," he said in a statement here yesterday.

Perera added from these samples, the BA.2 continued to be the dominant circulating sub-variant, with its multiple minor sub-lineages detected.

"However, in the last week of May, we detected the first incidents of the highly infectious BA.2.12.1 from a case in Kuching and a BA.5 from a case in Sibu.

"Subsequently, an additional case of BA.2.12.1 and three cases of BA.5 were detected in Kuching through the second and third weeks of June. The World Health Organisation had previously flagged both these sub-lineages as highly infectious," he said. - Bernama