

New haj restrictions rooted in Islam, says scholar

► 'Individuals unfit due to illnesses not accountable for missing pilgrimage'

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PETALING JAYA: Health restrictions for next year's haj may have sparked concern among would-be pilgrims, but Islamic scholars say the measures are rooted in faith, protecting life, preventing harm and upholding the true spirit of *syariah*.

International Islamic University Malaysia assistant professor Dr Abu Hafiz Salleh Hudin said the new rules mirror one of Islam's core principles that no act of worship

should endanger life.

"Although difficult for some, the restrictions do not contradict the essence of *syariah*. Haj is only obligatory for those who are physically and financially capable."

He added that those unfit due to serious or contagious illnesses are not accountable for missing the pilgrimage.

"Islam is compassionate and realistic. It never burdens a soul beyond its capacity."

"Those prevented from going because of illness still receive spiritual reward for their sincere intention."

Citing *Surah al-Imran*, verse 97, "Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by those who are able to undertake the journey," he said the concept of *istita'ah* (ability) now extends to modern health and safety standards.

"In the past, ability meant having

strength, means and safe passage. Today, it also includes compliance with measures that protect pilgrims' wellbeing."

He acknowledged the disappointment felt by elderly or ill Muslims who have saved for the journey but reminded them that divine reward lies in intention.

"The Prophet said 'actions are judged by intentions.' If someone is sincere but prevented by factors beyond their control, their reward remains as though they had performed haj."

Abu Hafiz said the rules reflect Islam's call to preserve life.

"Restricting high-risk individuals helps prevent disease outbreaks and protects millions gathered in one place, fulfilling the Quranic principle that saving one life is like saving all mankind."

He urged Malaysian religious bodies and haj course organisers to

emphasise health readiness and support those unable to perform the pilgrimage.

"Those affected should be reminded that their patience and intention are honoured before Allah. Sometimes, enduring such a test brings even greater reward than the pilgrimage itself."

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia public health specialist Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh said Saudi Arabia's tighter health rules for the 2026 haj are justified, given the high costs and risks involved.

"If people fall sick there, the cost would be huge, borne by the pilgrim, the Saudi authorities and the Malaysian government."

She added that most elderly pilgrims have multiple chronic illnesses, making health screenings vital to ensure only the fit could handle the physically demanding journey.

"Haj is an arduous journey. The screenings make sure only those capable of handling the strain are allowed to go."

However, she said the rules could have drawbacks.

"Many may not be able to participate because they might not make the cut. Medical facilities would also now be run by Saudi personnel rather than Tabung Haji (TH), so those who fall ill may face financial difficulties if they need hospital care."

Saudi Arabia's new policy bars individuals with serious chronic illnesses, infectious diseases, high-risk pregnancies, or conditions affecting mobility and cognition. The move aims to protect pilgrims' health during the mass gathering in harsh desert conditions.

TH said the policy aligns with the Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah's stricter requirements prioritising safety and comfort.

"Individuals with certain medical conditions will not be eligible for haj. These measures ensure the safety and comfort of all pilgrims," TH said, adding that most Malaysian personnel sent to the Holy Land each year are Health Ministry medical staff.

Sharifa said while the rules may disappoint some, they strike a necessary balance between faith and safety.

"The intention is not to exclude but to protect. Haj is a sacred duty, but it also demands endurance."



Sharifa said most elderly pilgrims have chronic illnesses, making health screenings vital to ensure only the fit could handle the physically demanding journey. — BERNAMAPIC

SAUDI GOVT REQUIREMENTS

'NEW HEALTH RULES SAFEGUARD PILGRIMS'

TH, Health Ministry to ensure they get quality healthcare, says Na'im

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SAUDI Arabia's new health requirements for haj are vital to ensure the safety and well-being of Malaysian pilgrims, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar.

"As the minister responsible for Lembaga Tabung Haji (TH), I am confident that TH, along with the Health Ministry, is ready to ensure every Malaysian pilgrim receives quality healthcare," he said.

Na'im said haj, being the fifth pillar of Islam, also tests one's physical and mental strength.

"Without good health, it is difficult to perform haj rituals perfectly."

He said the Saudi government had set health guidelines for all countries and Malaysia was committed to complying with them to ensure the safety, smoothness and completeness of pilgrims' worship.

TH and the Health Ministry are boosting mandatory health screenings to ensure only those physically fit are allowed to

embark, he added.

"For pilgrims who do not meet the minimum health requirements, postponing their haj is recommended to improve their health and prepare fully."

"TH will provide clinics, pharmacies and medical officers at pilgrim accommodations in Makkah and Madinah."

"Serious cases will be referred to Saudi hospitals with close monitoring by Health Ministry specialists."

"The Saudi government, particularly its Health Ministry, has expanded public and private hospital facilities, increased health personnel for haj, and enhanced healthcare services at key pilgrimage sites."

It was reported that Saudi Arabia, in announcing the requirements, said the TH Treatment Centre in the Holy Land would be discontinued.

Those needing medical attention will be referred to hospitals under Saudi government jurisdiction, with facilitation and monitoring by 225 Health Ministry officials.

Potential haj pilgrim Norfadiah Leela Nasaruddin, 39, said she hoped she will be given flexibility on the new rules.

The clerk, who suffers from a heart condition, said chronic illnesses do require careful medical

attention, but TH should consider negotiating with the Saudi authorities.

"We need to think about the majority of pilgrims who have been waiting for years," she said.

"Maybe TH can negotiate with the Saudi authorities, considering Malaysian pilgrims are known for their excellent conduct and organisation."

"Every year after haj, our country receives praise for being among those with the best-managed pilgrim groups."

However, she said, the new requirements were understandable as Malaysian pilgrims had maintained good health standards and a low mortality rate compared with those from other countries.

"Performing haj is the fifth pillar of Islam, but we must also remember to prioritise our health."

"TH does provide medical officers, but it can monitor only minor illnesses like fever. Chronic conditions, however, require intensive care."

"This, too, is a test for us as pilgrims."

"The stronger we are physically, the more resilient we will be mentally in fulfilling our worship."

"If we are weak, even our *ibadah* and haj rituals could be affected."



Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi chairing the National Entrepreneur and MSME Development Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. NSTP P.C. BY HARRIS, ANUAR SAH-M

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ENTREPRENEURS' CONCERNS

Zahid pledges to help entrepreneurs obtain halal certs

KUALA LUMPUR: The government will address entrepreneurs' concerns about difficulties in obtaining halal certification through inter-agency cooperation.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the matter will be brought to the Malaysian Halal Council to ensure relevant agencies and ministries work together effectively.

He said this after chairing the National Entrepreneur and MSME Development Council meeting here.

The meeting was attended by Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Minister Datuk Ewon Benedick and Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail.

Zahid said the meeting also

discussed emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in the context of anti-corruption.

"The presentation by the Securities Commission also touched on elements related to anti-corruption."

He said the meeting agreed to establish a National SME Anti-Corruption Strategy initiative to raise awareness among micro-, small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs about the importance of ethics and integrity in business.

The implementation of the strategy, which includes leveraging AI to accelerate progress and reduce costs, will be detailed by a task force led by the Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Ministry.

Kit sendiri kesan influenza perlu dijual di pasaran

Kuala Lumpur: Kerajaan perlu mendaftarkan penggunaan kit sendiri untuk influenza bagi memudahkan pengesanan awal jangkitan itu dalam kalangan orang awam, sekali gus berupaya mengelakkan penyebarannya.

Presiden Persatuan Farmasi Malaysia (MPS), Amrahi Buang, berkata sehingga kini pesakit hanya boleh mengesan influenza melalui doktor menggunakan kit berdaftar di klinik.

Beliau berkata, ia menyebabkan pengesanan lewat dilakukan sehingga menyebabkan mendatangkan risiko simptom menjadi serius, berbanding melakukannya di rumah menggunakan kit sendiri.

“Kesannya, ia menyebabkan kesesakan rawatan di jabatan kecemasan di hospital kerajaan susulan kemasukan ribuan pesakit yang mengalami simptom serius kerana lewat melakukan pemeriksaan.

“Bukankah lebih baik sekiranya ada kit sendiri yang berdaftar untuk mengekang jangkitan ini? Adalah sangat wajar untuk kerajaan menimbangkan keperluan kit sendiri untuk influenza di pasaran.

“Tentunya ia langkah yang lebih baik, lagi berkesan untuk



Amrahi Buang

mengekang jangkitan virus influenza ini. Rawatannya juga akan jauh lebih mudah jika dikesan lebih awal,” katanya dalam kenyataan, semalam.

Sebelum ini, Pihak Berkuasa Peranti Perubatan (MDA) dilaporkan memaklumkan belum memberikan sebarang kelulu-

san rasmi terhadap mana-mana produk kit sendiri influenza, sama ada dijual secara fizikal di premis atau dalam talian, sekali gus bermakna semua kit sendiri di pasaran termasuk di media sosial adalah tidak sah untuk

kegunaan orang awam.

Pada masa sama, Amrahi turut mempersoalkan penyebab kit sendiri tidak didaftarkan di pasaran sama ada kerana tiada permintaan daripada mana-mana syarikat atau kerajaan membuat keputusan untuk tidak membenarkannya.

Dari segi keperluan masyarakat, relevan untuk menggunakan kit sendiri kerana mereka mempunyai ilmu dan pengalaman menjaga diri sendiri seperti mana yang dipelajari ketika pandemik global COVID-19.

Katanya, jangkitan influenza boleh meragut nyawa, termasuk kanak-kanak, selain risiko kepada warga emas dan pesakit penyakit tidak berjangkit (NCD)

kronik, sekali gus menjadikan pengesanan awal membolehkannya dikawal dengan cepat.

“Apatah lagi rakyat kini lebih cakna dan bijak melakukan ujian sendiri atas pengalaman penggunaan kit itu ketika jangkitan COVID-19, malah kita melihat jangkitan Infuenza A begitu meluas sekali dengan memabitkan ribuan rakyat jelata khususnya kluster di sekolah dan ia sangat cepat merebak.

“Ia sangat cepat merebak berbanding virus COVID-19. Seperti diketahui umum, jangkitan influenza ini lebih lama daripada COVID-19. Ini mewajarkan lagi supaya kit sendiri ini dimasukkan ke dalam pasaran negara,” katanya.

TH, KKM perkukuh sistem pemeriksaan

Pastikan hanya bakal jemaah haji benar-benar sihat dibenar berangkat ke Makkah

Oleh ROSKHOIRAH YAHYA
 SHAH ALAM



Laporan Sinar Harian pada Selasa.

Tabung Haji (TH) dan Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) memperkukuh sistem pemeriksaan kesihatan wajib agar hanya bakal jemaah haji yang benar-benar layak dari segi kesihatan dibenarkan berangkat ke Tanah Suci.

Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri (Hal Ehwal Agama), Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar berkata, saranan penangguhan giliran haji bagi bagi mereka yang belum melepasi tahap kesihatan minimum bukan sebagai sekatan, tetapi untuk memperbaiki kesihatan dan bersedia sepenuhnya.

Menurutnya, ibadah haji bukan sekadar Rukun Islam kelima, ia juga ujian kemampuan (istito'ah), termasuk kemampuan dari segi kesihatan fizikal dan mental.

"Tanpa tubuh yang sihat, ibadah haji



MOHD NA'IM

yang sempurna sukar untuk dicapai. Oleh itu, saya menyambut baik pengumuman Kementerian Haji dan Umrah Arab Saudi mengenai syarat kesihatan baharu bagi ibadah haji musim 1447H/2026M.

"Kerajaan Arab Saudi telah menetapkan garis panduan kesihatan untuk semua negara dan Malaysia komited untuk mematuhi. Tujuannya jelas bagi menjaga keselamatan, kelancaran dan kesempurnaan ibadah para dhuyufurrahman.

"Sebagai Menteri yang bertanggungjawab terhadap Lembaga Tabung Haji yang menjadi institusi haji kebanggaan negara, saya yakin TH dengan kerjasama KKM bersedia memastikan setiap jemaah haji Malaysia mendapat perkhidmatan kesihatan terbaik, dari tanah air hingga ke Tanah Suci," katanya menerusi kenyataan di Facebook pada

Selasa.

Tambah beliau, TH juga akan memastikan setiap penginapan jemaah di Makkah dan Madinah dilengkapi klinik kesihatan, farmasi dan pegawai perubatan bertauliah.

Jelasnya, kes serius pula akan dirujuk ke hospital Arab Saudi dengan pemantauan rapi oleh pakar KKM.

"Kerajaan Arab Saudi, terutamanya Kementerian Kesihatan juga mengambil langkah proaktif dengan menyediakan kemudahan hospital sektor awam dan swasta yang moden dengan teknologi terkini.

"Dengan 225 petugas perubatan KKM di Tanah Suci, kita yakin mutu perkhidmatan kesihatan jemaah Malaysia akan terus berada pada tahap terbaik.

"Kerajaan melalui Jabatan Perdana Menteri (Hal Ehwal Agama) bersama TH dan Kementerian Haji dan Umrah Arab Saudi akan terus berganding bahu demi menjamin kebajikan, keselamatan dan kesejahteraan jemaah haji Malaysia," ujar beliau.

UBAT INFLUENZA DI FARMASI 'LICIN'

Beberapa farmasi di Lembah Klang kehabisan stok antiviral

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Ubat antiviral influenza di beberapa farmasi di Lembah Klang kehabisan stok sejak dua minggu lalu berikutan peningkatan kes influenza di Malaysia terutama dalam kalangan kanak-kanak.

Seorang juru farmasi ketika ditemui berkata, ubat antiviral, oseltamivir jenis sirap yang biasa diberikan untuk kanak-kanak dan tablet untuk dewasa kehabisan stok.

"Trend pembelian ubat antiviral untuk influenza memang ada musim setiap tahun, bagaimanapun tahun ini pembelian ubat itu lebih ketara.

"Ini mungkin atas kesedaran orang ramai untuk melakukan pemeriksaan ke-



Trend pembelian ubat antiviral untuk influenza memang ada musim setiap tahun, bagaimanapun tahun ini pembelian ubat itu lebih ketara. Ini mungkin atas kesedaran orang ramai untuk melakukan pemeriksaan kesihatan selepas ada simptom kerana setiap pembelian ubat antiviral perlukan preskripsi doktor"

Ahli farmasi

sihatan selepas ada simptom kerana setiap pembelian ubat antiviral perlukan preskripsi doktor," katanya.

Ditanya mengenai dakwaan peningkatan harga ubat berkenaan, juru farmasi itu menegaskan dakwaan itu tidak benar.

Katanya, ubat itu kekal dijual pada harga RM165 bagi sebotol sirap 100 mililiter (ml), manakala ubat jenis tablet dijual RM190 bagi 10 biji.

Dalam pada itu, satu lagi farmasi yang dikunjungi turut kehabisan stok oseltamivir jenis sirap sejak enam hari lalu.

Juru farmasi yang bertugasan berkata, hanya

ubat jenis tablet untuk dewasa saja yang masih ada.

"Farmasi tidak simpan banyak stok ubat oseltamivir jenis sirap. Walaupun kes influenza banyak dilaporkan, farmasi tidak kenaikan harga ubat.

"Harga ubat antiviral berbeza mengikut jenama dan kategor ubati. Sebagai contoh, oseltamivir original berharga lebih RM100 bagi 10 tablet, manakala oseltamivir generic pula boleh didapati pada harga puluhan ringgit," katanya.

Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) sebelum ini memaklumkan, terdapat peningkatan kes jangkitan influenza di seluruh negara, khususnya membabit-

kan institusi pendidikan.

Menurut KKM, berdasarkan pemantauan Survelan Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) dan Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI), kadar konsultasi pesakit meningkat daripada 7.38 peratus kepada 9.22 peratus antara Minggu Epidemiologi (ME) ke-40 dan ke-41 tahun ini.

Secara kumulatif, sejak awal tahun hingga ME ke-41, lebih 530 kluster influenza direkodkan di seluruh negara.

Pada 13 Oktober lalu, kira-kira 6,000 murid dan pelajar sekolah dikesan dijangkiti virus influenza.

Ketua Pengarah Pendidikan, Dr Mohd Azam Ahmad berkata, susulan itu, beberapa sekolah melaksanakan arahan penutupan sementara atas nasihat Pejabat Kesihatan Daerah masing-masing.



UBAT antiviral jenis tablet dijual pada harga RM190 bagi 10 biji.

'Kit ujian sendiri influenza perlu ada di pasaran'

SHAH ALAM – Kit *self-test* (ujian sendiri) bagi jangkitan influenza perlu berada di pasaran tempatan bagi membolehkan masyarakat mengesan penyakit itu lebih awal dan mengekang penularannya.

Presiden Persatuan Farmasi Malaysia (MPS), Profesor Amrahi Buang, berkata perkara tersebut penting memandangkan Pihak Berkuasa Peranti Perubatan (MDA) baru-baru ini mengeluarkan kenyataan bahawa tiada kit ujian sendiri influenza didaftarkan di Malaysia ketika ini.

Menurutnya, kenyataan MDA itu bermaksud semua kit ujian sendiri influenza yang dijual di pasaran termasuk di media sosial adalah tidak sah untuk kegunaan orang awam.

"Adakah ketiadaan kit berdaftar itu berpunca daripada tiada permintaan oleh syarikat pengeluar atau keputusan kerajaan untuk tidak membenarkannya.

"Dari segi keperluan masyarakat, kewujudan kit berkenaan adalah relevan kerana rakyat kini sudah mempunyai pengetahuan dan pengalaman menjaga diri sendiri hasil pembelajaran semasa pandemik Covid-19," katanya dalam kenyataan pada Selasa.

Amrahi berkata, kerajaan sewajarnya meneliti keberkesanan kit ujian sendiri influenza yang digunakan di peringkat antarabangsa sebagaimana dilakukan terhadap kit ujian sendiri Covid-19 sebelum ini.

Beliau menjelaskan, penularan influenza A kini semakin meluas dan melibatkan ribuan rakyat, khususnya kluster di seko-



AMRAHI

lah di seluruh negara.

"Virus influenza juga merebak lebih cepat berbanding Covid-19 dan boleh berlaku sepanjang tahun di Malaysia kerana iklim tropika.

"Jangkitan influenza ini telah meragut nyawa termasuk kanak-kanak dan risiko terhadap warga emas serta pesakit kronik adalah nyata.

"Jika penyakit ini dapat dikesan awal, ia boleh dikawal dan dirawat dengan cepat,"

ujar beliau.

Menurutnya, kelewatan mengesan virus menyebabkan peningkatan kes di Jabatan Kecemasan hospital apabila pesakit hanya mengetahui dijangkiti selepas berjumpa doktor untuk rawatan, manakala pengesanan dilakukan melalui kit ujian berdaftar di klinik yang menyebabkan kelewatan kawalan penularan.

"Maka dalam situasi ini, bukankah lebih baik sekiranya ada kit ujian sendiri influenza yang berdaftar di pasaran? Rakyat kini lebih cakna dan bijak melakukan ujian sendiri hasil pengalaman mengekang wabak Covid-19," katanya.

Amrahi berkata, kit sendiri Covid-19 masih dijual di lebih 4,000 farmasi komuniti di seluruh negara, justeru langkah memperkenalkan kit ujian sendiri influenza adalah kesinambungan yang wajar dan berkesan untuk mengekang wabak tersebut.

Katanya, rawatan akan jauh lebih murah jika penyakit dikesan lebih awal dan farmasi komuniti bersedia mendidik orang ramai mengenai cara penggunaan kit ujian sendiri berkenaan.

SAKIT PINGGANG merupakan satu masalah kesihatan yang kerap dialami oleh masyarakat pada pelbagai peringkat umur, sama ada golongan muda, dewasa mahupun warga emas. Ia boleh berpunca daripada pelbagai faktor seperti gaya hidup, pekerjaan, dan kecederaan fizikal.

Meskipun sering dianggap sebagai masalah biasa, sakit pinggang yang tidak dirawat dengan betul boleh menjejaskan kualiti hidup seseorang serta mengganggu aktiviti harian. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk kita memahami punca, gejala, dan rawatan yang sesuai bagi menangani masalah ini.

Terdapat pelbagai punca yang boleh menyebabkan seseorang mengalami sakit pinggang. Antara punca yang paling lazim ialah postur tubuh yang tidak betul, terutama semasa duduk atau berdiri dalam tempoh yang lama. Gaya hidup sedentari yang kurang pergerakan juga boleh menyumbang kepada kelemahan otot-otot di sekitar pinggang dan tulang belakang. Selain itu, kerja berat dan cara mengangkat objek yang salah juga merupakan antara punca utama sakit pinggang, terutamanya dalam kalangan pekerja buruh, petani dan pengangkut barang. Beban yang berlebihan memberi tekanan kepada tulang belakang, khususnya bahagian lumbar, lalu menyebabkan rasa sakit dan ketegangan otot.

Kecederaan fizikal akibat kemalangan, bersukan atau jatuh juga boleh menyebabkan kecederaan pada ligamen, otot atau cakera tulang belakang. Dalam sesetengah kes, cakera tulang belakang yang tergelincir (slipped disc) boleh menekan saraf, lalu menyebabkan kesakitan yang menjalar hingga ke bahagian kaki.

Gejala sakit pinggang berbeza-beza mengikut punca dan tahap keseriusan. Antara gejala yang lazim dialami ialah sakit di bahagian bawah belakang, yang boleh berupa rasa tajam, berdenyut, atau rasa tidak selesa yang berpanjangan. Sakit ini mungkin berlaku secara tiba-tiba selepas melakukan aktiviti berat, atau muncul secara perlahan-lahan akibat postur yang salah.

Dalam sesetengah kes, rasa sakit boleh menjalar ke bahagian punggung, paha, dan kaki, terutamanya jika melibatkan tekanan

Sering Alami **SAKIT PINGGANG?**

Ketahui Punca dan Rawatannya

pada saraf sciatica (saraf terbesar di tubuh manusia). Penghidap juga mungkin mengalami kebas atau lemah pada kaki, atau rasa seperti dicatuk-catuk.

Selain itu, kesakitan untuk membongkok, duduk terlalu lama, atau berdiri terlalu lama juga merupakan gejala biasa. Dalam keadaan yang lebih serius, sakit pinggang boleh disertai dengan demam, penurunan berat badan secara mendadak, atau masalah kawalan pundi kencing dan usus, yang memerlukan rawatan perubatan segera.

Rawatan bagi sakit pinggang bergantung kepada puncanya. Bagi kes ringan, cukup melakukan perkara seperti:

- Rehat secukupnya
 - Senaman regangan
 - Penggunaan ubat tahan sakit seperti paracetamol
 - Rawatan fisioterapi
- Selain rawatan, langkah pencegahan juga amat penting

untuk mengelakkan sakit pinggang berulang. Antaranya ialah:

- Mengamalkan postur tubuh yang betul semasa duduk, berdiri dan mengangkat barang
- Penggunaan kerusi ergonomik
- Mengekalkan berat badan ideal

Sakit pinggang bukanlah satu masalah yang boleh dipandang ringan. Ia bukan sahaja memberi kesan kepada keselesaan dan kesihatan fizikal, malah turut menjejaskan produktiviti dan kualiti hidup individu. Dengan pemahaman yang jelas tentang punca, gejala, dan kaedah rawatan yang sesuai, kita dapat mengambil langkah-langkah pencegahan yang sewajarnya.



YOUR OPINION

Keeping eyes healthy in a screen-obsessed world

EVERY year on World Sight Day (Oct 9), health professionals worldwide highlight the importance of eye care and preventing avoidable blindness.

While much of the discussion centres on cataracts, refractive errors and access to vision screening, an emerging concern is the increase in excessive screen use and Internet gaming disorder (IGD) among adolescents.

For many teenagers, gaming is a sense of excitement, connection and accomplishment. But for some, what starts as fun becomes a compulsive habit that disrupts their sleep, academic performance and health.

Recognised by both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the American Psychiatric Association, IGD is defined as a behavioural addiction marked by loss of control over gaming, prioritising it over other daily activities, and continuing to play despite experiencing negative consequences.

Globally, an estimated 3% of Internet users meet the criteria for IGD – with significantly higher rates reported among adolescents in Asia.

In Malaysia, local studies suggest that around 3% to 4% of adolescents experience symptoms consistent with IGD, a figure that is expected to rise as the number of young online gamers continues to grow.

IGD often co-exists with other addictive behaviours, including gambling and substance use. It is also linked to anxiety, depression and poor academic performance.

Adolescents who experience bullying, loneliness or stress may turn to gaming as an escape, reinforcing the cycle of dependence.



Photo: TNS

The human eye was never designed for prolonged exposure to artificial light or rapidly moving digital images.

Prolonged screen time or gaming sessions can lead to digital eye strain (DES), a condition now affecting more than half of school-aged children worldwide.

Symptoms include sore, tired, burning or itchy eyes; blurred or double vision; and increased sensitivity to light.

Teenagers whose eyes are still developing are at increased risk for rapid myopia (short-sightedness), eye misalignment and coordination problems.

The theme for World Sight Day 2025, “#Love Your Eyes”, encourages everyone to prioritise vision care by practising digital hygiene and responsible screen use every day.

Experts recommend the following simple but effective strategies to reduce eye strain:

> Follow the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look 20ft away for 20 seconds;

> Blink often to keep eyes moist and refreshed;

> Use lubricating eye drops when needed;

> Adjust your workstation ergonomics. Keep screens an arm's length away and slightly below eye level; and

> Take regular breaks and limit screen use before bedtime.

Technological innovations such as blue-light filters, anti-reflective coatings and high-resolution displays help reduce visual fatigue. But these should complement, not replace, healthy habits.

Protecting adolescent eye health requires a community-wide effort. Schools can integrate digital well-being into health education while parents can set limits on gaming time and encourage outdoor activities.

Gaming is not inherently harmful; it becomes problematic only when moderation and balance are lost.

Encouraging teens to engage in gaming responsibly alongside physical and social activities will

help them maintain both mental and visual well-being.

The message is straightforward: safeguarding our eyesight involves more than just wearing glasses or seeking medical treatment. It also requires adapting to a world dominated by screens.

Our eyes are the first to indicate when our digital habits have become excessive, but their warnings are often overlooked.

Let's genuinely “love our eyes” by blinking more, gazing into the distance and using screens wisely.

After all, in the game of life, having a clear vision is the most valuable achievement.

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