

AKHBAR : KOSMO
 MUKA SURAT : 17
 RUANGAN : NEGARA

396 kes dalam tempoh tiga bulan, meningkat berbanding 24 kes tahun lalu

Kes denggi di Kuantan 'menakutkan'

Oleh ABDUL RASHID ABDUL RAHMAN

KUANTAN – Kes demam denggi di daerah ini menunjukkan trend 'menakutkan' apabila merekodkan peningkatan drastik iaitu sebanyak 396 peratus dalam tempoh tiga bulan pertama tahun ini.

Untuk rekod bermula Januari hingga Mac, sebanyak 119 kes dilaporkan berbanding hanya 24 kes dalam tempoh yang sama tahun lalu.

Pengarah Kesihatan Pahang, Datuk Dr. Nor Azimi Yunus berkata, dalam tempoh berkenaan, sebanyak 228 kes denggi direkodkan di seluruh negeri dengan daerah Kuantan menjadi penyumbang terbanyak iaitu sebanyak 52.2 peratus.

"Sehingga 25 Mac tahun ini, daerah Kuantan melaporkan sebanyak lapan wabak berbanding satu wabak bagi tempoh yang sama tahun 2022 iaitu peningkatan sebanyak tujuh wabak.

"Empat wabak dilaporkan masih aktif dan Kuantan menjadi penyumbang utama peningkatan kes dan wabak demam denggi



PENGUAT kuasa Jabatan Kesihatan negeri melakukan pemeriksaan dalam Ops Bersepadu Wabak Denggi di sebuah rumah di Kampung Padang, Kuantan baru-baru ini.

di negeri ini," katanya di sini semalam.

Menurut Nor Azimi, peningkatan mendadak kes denggi di daerah ini berpunca daripada

kurangnya kesedaran masyarakat terhadap penjagaan kebersihan persekitaran terutamanya dalam memusnahkan tempat pembiakan nyamuk aedes.

Tambahnya, kepadatan penduduk yang tinggi di ibu negeri Pahang itu juga menyumbang kepada penularan demam denggi dan kejadian wabak yang lebih

cepat serta lebih mudah berbanding daerah-daerah lain di Pahang.

Dalam pada itu, katanya, daerah Bera turut merekodkan kes denggi tertinggi iaitu sebanyak 19 kes diikuti Temerloh (18 kes), Raub (17 kes), Maran (15 kes), Bentong (11 kes), Rompin (11 kes), Lipis (lapan kes), Cameron Highlands (empat kes) serta Jerantut dan Pekan masing-masing tiga kes.

Beliau memberitahu, sebanyak 10 wabak dilaporkan di seluruh negeri dalam tempoh sama berbanding empat lokaliti wabak bagi tempoh yang sama tahun lalu.

Katanya lagi, sebagai langkah kawalan, pihaknya telah melakukan pemeriksaan di 117,412 premis di seluruh negeri dengan 1,065 premis didapati positif pembiakan nyamuk aedes.

"Sebanyak 35 premis daripada 632 premis telah dikompaun di bawah Akta Pemusnahan Serangga Pembawa Penyakit 1975 (Pindaan) 2000, dengan nilai kompaun yang ditawarkan sebanyak RM17,500," tegasnya.

AKHBAR : THE SUN

MUKA SURAT : 4

RUANGAN : NEWS WITHOUT BORDERS

Govt steps up fight as dengue cases surge over 400%

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cabinet Committee to Combat Dengue has been reactivated after dengue cases surged more than 400% this year, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said as at March 25, a total of 26,222 dengue cases had been reported, compared with 8,124 for the same period last year, with deaths due to dengue fever complications also rising to 17 from just four previously.

"Therefore, to resolve this issue we will get NGOs and volunteer doctors to make scheduled visits to districts or specific locations known for mosquito infestations and dengue."

"For this, we will not be seeking additional allocations but will adopt corporate social responsibility approaches like mobilising assets of the National Disaster Management Agency outside the flood season to ferry equipment for anti-dengue operations," he said at a press conference following a meeting of the Cabinet Committee to Combat Dengue in Parliament yesterday.

Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa was also present at the press conference.

Ahmad Zahid said among the prevention methods which would be intensified was the use of BioGel to trap and kill Aedes mosquitoes.

"Another method involving Wolbachia mosquitoes would also be used. This is a new and generally cheaper method."

He said the annual allocation for fighting dengue was RM240 million, but the government generally only used one-eighth of the allocation.

He said the committee had agreed to establish a state-level committee, which would streamline operations at dengue hotspots in districts, housing estates and villages.

Ahmad Zahid is confident the unity government could achieve its zero dengue target by the end of its term as it was committed to the fight against the disease. - Bernama

AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 1

RUANGAN : MUKA HADAPAN

Booster on the *back burner*

Nearly a year after the second Covid-19 booster shot was rolled out, most Malaysians still refuse to take the jab, fearing potential side effects. However, doctors say the elderly and those in high-risk groups should take the second booster for extra protection against severe Covid-19 symptoms.

- A mere 3.5% or 815,191 adults have gone for their second booster shot, compared to 69.1% or 16,253,760 adults who have received their first booster shot
- As of Feb 1, there were 8,633,249 vaccine doses in stock; they will expire between February and September
- 98.4% or 23,140,956 of those aged 18 and above in Malaysia have been vaccinated

> See reports on page 5 by
RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM,
GERARD GIMINO and LO TERN CHERN



Photo: AZHAR MAHFUF/The Star

AKHBAR : THE STAR
 MUKA SURAT : 5
 RUANGAN : NATION

'Not many takers for jab'

Second booster shot uptake very low, say experts

By GERARD GIMINO and
 RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM
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PETALING JAYA: Only less than 3% of the population have received their second booster shot, and private healthcare practitioners said the statistic reflect the reality on the ground.

"Not many people are coming forward, the uptake is quite low," said Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah, the president of Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia.

Dr Raj said the poor uptake for the second booster jab is due to the fear of potential side effects because of negative news circulated on social media.

"Anyway we have already attained herd immunity, so it is actually not so necessary to get the second booster," he said.

According to the KKMNow website, as of March 27, a total of 816,291 doses of the second booster were administered, meaning that only about 2.5% of the population have been inoculated with the jab since it was made available in May last year.

The highest uptake was among those aged 70 to 79 years old, followed by 60-69 and the above 80 age groups.

Comparatively, 50% of the eligible population had received their first booster with a total of 16,321,387 doses administered.

However, the numbers are relatively low compared to the primary doses where 86.1% (28,132,628 doses) had received the first shot and 84.3% (27,545,367 doses) had completed their second dose.

Asked if the low percentage of second booster is a cause for concern to the overall population, Dr Raj replied that "the repercussions are not much now because we have attained herd immunity unless there is a new strain".

"We are also not sure if the vaccine will help with the new strain. I



Staying safe: Dr Muhammad Fadzil Rahmat vaccinating a woman at a clinic in Kota Damansara. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

think it is not so compulsory (right now)," he added.

"Herd immunity" refers to the indirect protection from an infectious disease that happens when a population is immune either through vaccination or immunity developed through previous infection.

Echoing Dr Raj on the poor uptake for the second booster shot, Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia president Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh said the fears and concerns over the seriousness of Covid-19 have subsided.

"There is no more hype in the media, no more restrictions and Standard Operating Procedure (have been relaxed), it gives a feeling (of less concern) to the general public or any human being for that matter not just in Malaysia, but other parts of the world, hence there is not much of a concern about (Covid-19) anymore," he said.

He said people were more recep-

tive towards vaccination in the past because Covid-19 was seen as "visibly dangerous".

"People were dying of Covid-19, the hospitals were full, the picture was grim," he said.

However, he said high-risk groups such as those with pre-existing health conditions are advised by doctors to take their second booster shot.

He said most private hospitals have also stopped offering the Comirnaty vaccine produced by Pfizer-BioNTech following the conclusion of the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme, adding that the vaccine was previously sourced from the government via ProtectHealth Corporation Sdn Bhd.

However, the Comirnaty booster shots are available in clinics.

He said after the conclusion of the national immunisation drive, private hospitals were given the choice of whether they wanted to procure vaccines that were com-

mercially available.

He added that some private hospitals may still offer the Sinovac vaccine (called CoronaVac) but not Comirnaty as each vial contains six doses, which means six people will have to be injected once a vial is opened. The Comirnaty vaccine was health authorities' recommended shot for the second booster.

Dr Raj and Dr Kuljit are of the view that non-high risk groups can also opt for the second booster shot and there are no restrictions towards it.

Dr Steven Chow, president of Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Associations Malaysia, said apart from the perception that the vaccine is not free from side effects, some may even see the second booster shot as having no added value at this stage.

Citing the *Lancet* medical journal, he said the emergence of affordable and powerful oral anti-Covid-19 drugs, and the increased uptake of vaccination will bring hope for the end of the pandemic.

"At this point in time virtually the entire population of Malaysia have either had the designated two doses of the vaccine or have had an episode of natural infection. The data for the second booster dose for non-high risk groups is yet to be forthcoming," he said.

In a parliamentary reply on March 23, the Health Minister said only 69.1% or 16,253,760 of those aged 18 and above received their first Covid-19 booster dose, with only 3.5% or 815,191 receiving the second booster.

She also added that there were also 8,633,249 vaccine doses from various manufacturers yet to be used, and were set to expire between February and September this year.

It was previously reported that 2,796,638 vaccine doses stored by the Health Ministry have expired as of Feb 28.

Those from high-risk groups still advised to mask up

By LO TERN CHERN
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GEORGE TOWN: Health experts are still advising people to continue to mask up, especially those with comorbidities and from high-risk groups.

Penang Hospital infectious diseases unit head Datuk Dr Chow Ting Soo said masking up could help prevent the spread of any respiratory illness.

"When a person is unwell, it is best to stay away and get tested. Get help from clinics if there are signs of breathlessness.

"They should also mask up to prevent spread of the virus, especially on public transport.

"But for aircraft, where most air handling units do not recycle air, it is safe and acceptable if one does not use a mask as the risk of transmission of respiratory illnesses is low," she said.

Dr Chow added that with sufficient ventilation, chances of transmission of the virus to a healthy person is now considered low.

"Almost all the people have received double doses of the vaccine and more than half the population got their third dose. Besides that, a large number of people who were infected developed certain immunity against Covid-19.

"The current circulating strain being Omicron is largely mild in symptoms. Oral antivirals are now available to assist and prevent severe infection for the high-risk population once they're infected.

"Hence, indoors or in areas where the air circulation is good, there is no need to mask up if one is well," she said.

Meanwhile, sales of face masks, once decked up to the ceiling at stores and every corner along the streets here, have plummeted.

A store owner in Ayer Itam, Lee Choon Mei, 60, said she used to stock up an entire shelf of masks for adults and children, but these days, only those for children seem to be still in demand.

"I still get customers buying two to three boxes of face masks for their children, as they need to wear them to school.

"But the demand for adult face masks has dropped significantly," she said.

A box of 50 masks for children now retails at RM8, while those for adults retails at RM6 at Lee's store.

During the early stages of the movement control order in March 2020, demand for masks skyrocketed, with a pack of 50 pieces costing about RM100.

Pharmacist Goh Yew Lee, 46, said the drop in demand had resulted in her reducing the price of her masks.

"At the start of the pandemic in 2020, the entire shelf was filled with face masks.

"I could sell between 200 and 300 boxes daily, sometimes we would even run out of stock.

"Today, fewer than 10 boxes are sold each day.

"Other items such as sanitisers are only being bought by those who want to observe extra hygiene, especially for their children," she said, adding that some customers are also switching to using three-ply masks instead of the four-ply ones with the easing of the pandemic.

Second booster drive needs a boost

PETALING JAYA: While some people are wary about getting their second Covid-19 vaccination booster, citing potential side effects, others have already lined up appointments for their fourth jab in total.

Event manager JT Lim, 55, opted for his second booster as soon as the option was made available on the MySejahtera app.

"My job requires me to meet new people every day. Having the second booster gives me more peace of mind in case I contract Covid-19," said the father of two who has been infected with the disease twice.

Content moderator Muhd Faizal, 36, said he already has an appointment for the second booster and was due to receive it next week.

"I am a diabetic and my physician recommended I get the second booster when possible. At least I know if I contract Covid-19, my body will be better prepared to handle it," he said.

Carmen Goh, 31, said there should be more clarity on whether healthy individuals were required to take the second booster shot.

"I am curious whether a person who is not high risk can take the second booster.

"If yes, I would love to do so. Right now, I am not sure how to get

the booster.

"Maybe more clarity will help," said the analyst from Penang.

However, self-employed D. Chandran, 50, was adamant against receiving the second booster dose, saying he experienced severe allergic reactions when he took his first booster.

"It was a three-month ordeal as I had multiple negative reactions. I am a vegetarian, but consuming vegetables gave me allergic reactions (after the first booster).

"Even taking paracetamol caused my eyes to swell and tear, and I had rashes all over my body," he said, adding that multiple trips to the clinic didn't solve the issue.

"It was only when I sought treatment from an authorised alternative treatment practitioner that things improved," he said.

Similarly, analyst S. Wong said his first booster shot left him feverish and lethargic for slightly more than a week.

"I'm not sure if I want to get the second booster as the side effects really impaired my productivity.

"It was challenging as I had to juggle between work and looking after my newborn," he said.

Experts recommend that those in high-risk groups, like the elderly

and those with comorbidities, take the booster dose.

"Those in such groups also have a higher risk of developing severe symptoms, such as pneumonia," if they contract Covid-19," said Malaysian Society of Infectious Diseases and Chemotherapy president Prof Dr Zamberi Sekawi.

The consultant clinical microbiologist at Universiti Putra Malaysia said it would also be an uphill task to encourage the public to receive their second booster doses, citing the low take-up rates.

"Current awareness towards Covid-19 is lower compared with before, which could lead to a lack of urgency among the public to receive boosters.

"Medical practitioners should play a part in encouraging those from high-risk groups to receive boosters as an added layer of protection against severe Covid-19 symptoms," he said, adding that the general public should also get boosted as a precaution.

Prof Zamberi added that a fear of side effects was another possible reason for the lower take-up rates.

"The issue of messages linking deteriorating health conditions to booster dose, which is in fact not scientifically proven, also creates

hesitation," he said.

Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine president Prof Dr Tan Maw Pin said the elderly should consider getting the booster as the potential side effects are likely to be less risky than getting severe Covid-19 symptoms.

"Booster shots push one's immunity back up, providing better protection against the virus.

"The risk of being hospitalised or even succumbing to the virus is also reduced," said Prof Tan, who is a consultant geriatrician at the Universiti Malaya Medical Centre.

Among the side effects commonly experienced by the elderly after receiving their vaccines were being feverish, unwell or experiencing slight inflammation at the injection site.

"This usually subsides after several days," said Prof Tan.

She also advised the elderly, those from high-risk groups, as well as those working in healthcare, to get their booster shots as an added layer of protection.

"Frequent travellers too should also get their booster shot as a precaution.

"The virus mutates over time and any form of protection is much welcome," she said.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 8
RUANGAN : NATION

Group threatens major contract doctors' strike

It is asking doctors to support by taking emergency or medical leave on April 3-5

By RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM
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PETALING JAYA: A group whose members identified themselves as contract medical officers with the Health Ministry has threatened mass resignation and a nationwide "strike" that could involve some 8,000 doctors from April 3-5.

An account known as "Mogok Doktor Malaysia" (Malaysian Doctors Strike) has since emerged on social media.

Unlike a traditional strike, the organisers have asked doctors to take emergency or medical leave on April 3-5 as a sign of protest, adding that they do not encourage demonstrations or flashmobs, although they also warned of potential mass resignations on April 1.

A representative of the group, who declined to be named, told *The Star* that it had decided to proceed with the strike peacefully by taking emergency leave or medical leave "because demonstration or walkouts will cause harm".

"We have confirmed that an estimated 8,000 out of some 20,000 contract medical officers (MOs) will participate in this strike or mass resignation event," the representative said when contacted.

"(Some) 3,000 contract MOs will resign on April 1, while the rest will not be present to work from April 3-5," the representative said.

The group's demands include the absorption of all contract MOs into permanent positions without any conditions or interviews; basic salary increments; higher on-call rates; a resolution to the shortage of specialists, MOs and house officers; and an automatic reduction in the compulsory service term for medical officers to three years.

It is also calling for a reduction in on-call and work hours for MOs and house officers, while on-call hours should not exceed six times a month, and working hours needed to be capped at 60 hours a week.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said the ministry is only aware of the alleged industrial action via

"We have confirmed that an estimated 8,000 out of some 20,000 contract medical officers (MOs) will participate in this strike or mass resignation event."

Mogok Doktor Malaysia representative

social media.

"Generally, when a strike is organised, it is meant to send a specific message to the relevant parties.

"However, this has to be carefully thought through because health is a critical service—it involves lives and the wellbeing of the people," he said in a statement.

Dr Noor Hisham said a strike is not the best way to raise issues in the medical profession.

He added the government has from time to time responded and acted on the issues raised and the requests of healthcare workers.

"Among them is the permanent posting, specialist training sponsorship or further training, time-based promotions, opportunities for promotion to special grade, and establishing the UD56 grade for specialists and others. Other health schemes were also taken into account and improved.

"I believe the government from time to time will ensure that all problems and requests are looked into in line with current issues, and are given the right solution based on the country's economic capabilities," he said.

Dr Noor Hisham added that the government will continue to prioritise health services, as shown in Budget 2023.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
 MUKA SURAT : 9
 RUANGAN : NATION

THE STAR, WEDNESDAY 29 MARCH 2023

Nation 9

No hike for Raya goods



Quality control: Dr Rose (second left) inspecting one of the stalls at the Ramadan bazaar in Kota Kinabalu yesterday.

Thirty items to have price caps for upcoming festival

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 30 items are set to be gazetted under the Festive Season Maximum Price Scheme (SHMPP) throughout the Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration.

Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Minister Datuk Seri Salahuddin Ayub said the matter will be discussed comprehensively with all industry players, especially those involved in the supply of raw materials, controlled goods and essential items.

He said it has also been suggested that the SHMPP implementation period is from seven days before, two days during and seven days after Hari Raya Aidilfitri, adding that it will be announced next week.

"This is to enable the community to spend to celebrate Aidilfitri later," he said when winding up the debate on the Royal Address at Dewan Negara yesterday.

Previously, the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry (KPDN) had gazetted a total of eight types of goods for the implementation of the SHMPP for Chinese New Year from Jan 15-29, 2023.

Meanwhile in Kota Kinabalu, it was report-

ed that some 700 health personnel have been mobilised to inspect and monitor Ramadan bazaars throughout Sabah until the end of the fasting month.

State health director Datuk Dr Rose Nani Mudin said this was to ensure such bazaars only sold food that was safe for consumption.

Dr Rose said her staff members have so far checked 277 stalls in bazaars in five districts namely Kota Kinabalu, Papar, Tawau, Sandakan and Kudat since March 27.

"Following the checks, we have issued 21 compound notices to food operators under Section 32B of the Food Act 1983," she told reporters after visiting the Ramadan bazaar at Lintasan Deasoka here yesterday.

"Most of the notices were for offences such as not wearing aprons, long finger nails, absence of food handlers certification and no typhoid vaccine injection, among others."

"We have also taken four food samples for testing previously and will also be taking further samples at this bazaar today (yesterday)," she said.

"This is a routine to ensure there is no food contamination. We send the samples to the lab for testing and the results will come back in five days," she added.

Dr Rose said the 21 compound notices were mostly reminders for hawkers to follow the rules although some were issued with heavier fines.

"But it doesn't necessarily have to be a RM100 compound because (if an offence was found) we will launch an investigation and assess the penalty."

"Ultimately, what's important is cleanliness and food hygiene," she said.

It was reported on Monday that nine Ramadan stall operators were handed compound notices of RM100 each for various health violations at bazaars in Sabah's east coast Sandakan district.

Sandakan health officer Dr Johari Awang Besar said among the offences committed were not having typhoid injection health cards for their workers, the absence of food handler certificates and failure to ensure cleanliness at their respective stalls.

AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 12

RUANGAN : NATION

Dengue cases jump 223%

DPM: A whopping 26,222 cases recorded in first quarter of the year

KUALA LUMPUR: Dengue cases in the country saw a massive 223% spike in the first quarter of the year compared with the same period last year.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said that as of March 25, a total of 26,222 dengue cases were recorded, compared with 8,124 cases in the corresponding period last year.

He also said the number of deaths due to dengue complications had risen by 400% to 17 from four deaths last year.

He said this in the Parliament building after chairing the Cabinet committee meeting to address dengue.

The highest number of cases was recorded in Selangor, with a total of 13,510 cases, followed by Sabah (2,685), Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya (2,430), Penang (2,113), and Johor (1,758).

Ahmad Zahid said the government had taken various measures, including having non-governmental organisations and volunteer doctors go to the ground, especially in hotspots, based on a schedule.

He said the government has also allocated about RM240mil a year



Battling dengue: A DBKL Vector Control Unit personnel carrying out fogging at an abandoned building in Taman Goodwood Off Jalan Kuchai Lama, Kuala Lumpur. — YAP CHEE HONG/ The Star

to address issues faced by dengue patients.

"So, we are looking at new approaches as we aim to achieve a zero-dengue target.

"This includes using BioGel bait, in the form of hydrogel beads, that can attract and kill mosquitoes," he added.

Other methods include the use of Wolbachia-infected mosquitoes to biologically control the spread of dengue.

"We will continue to take proactive measures and outside-the-box methods to reduce the cases and achieve our zero-dengue aim," he said.

The Cabinet committee meeting also took note of the resource constraints faced by the Health Ministry and local authorities, but Ahmad Zahid said the government will utilise existing resources, including mobilising assets under the National Disaster Management Agency outside of the flood season.