

Malaysians can start to live with Covid-19, says KJ

By Tharanya Arumugam - March 5, 2022



Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin speaks during the launch of the 16th National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia Annual Dialysis Conference 2022 in Petaling Jaya. -NSTP/EIZAIRI SHAMSUDIN

KUALA LUMPUR: While the Omicron wave is showing no signs of abating with the country registering over 30,000 fresh infections daily since March 3, the Health Ministry says Malaysians can "start to live with Covid-19."

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin pointed out that Malaysia was in a transition phase to endemicity but the government would continue to implement and strengthen existing public health measures and strategies against Covid-19.

The ministry's focus now, he said, was on expanding its arsenal to fight Covid-19 (which includes procuring oral antivirals), enhancing care for high-risk individuals and formulating the best Covid-19 clinical care pathway into treatment protocols.

Khairy explained that although the daily case rate was still high, the impact of Covid-19 disease on people had begun to decrease as evident from indicators such as hospitalisations, admissions to intensive care units (ICU) and mortality rate.

"This is a sign of our country's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Malaysia also has a successful immunisation rate against Covid, which is among the best vaccination coverage in the world."

Khairy said this in his speech during the launch of the 16th National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia Annual Dialysis Conference 2022 in Petaling Jaya today.

Additionally, he said Malaysia was set to receive an initial shipment of 110,000 treatment courses of Pfizer's Covid-19 oral antiviral treatment, Paxlovid, this month.

Khairy said that the health ministry was also looking at procuring two other Covid-19 antivirals - Merck's Molnupiravir and AstraZeneca's Covid antibody drug.

"Prior to this, we only had vaccines, but now we will have antiviral to be administered to Covid high-risk patients.

"So, the 'weapons' we have to fight the SARS-COV-2 pandemic are increasing and this encourages us to continue to press forward with recovery, with reopening safely and more importantly to shift the focus of public healthcare not just on Covid-19 but also on non-Covid-19 matters as well.

"Over this two-year period, the healthcare system has been largely focused on managing Covid and treating Covid patients. Unlike during the Delta wave peak, the situation now is largely under control."

These data and new developments in the country's pandemic management, he said, had assured the ministry that Malaysia could continue with the recovery plan and to reopen in stages.

"We are now in a transition phase to endemicity. As to when endemic will be reached, that is something that needs to be interpreted technically.

"But we are already in the process of transitioning to an endemic stage. This shift must be done carefully. But there is no need for us to look back to lockdowns or movement control orders anymore."

Khairy said the public, however, must adhere to the current public health measures and SOP in place at all times, which include wearing face mask, getting the booster jab and vaccinating children aged five to 11.

"Yes, I still look at daily (Covid) numbers but more importantly I look at the ICU capacity, hospitalisations and number of patients who recover at home without having to visit CAC, hospitals or PKRC."

Khairy said of the total number of active cases now (305,010), 96 per cent were home quarantined (292,696 patients).

Many, he said, were Category 1 and 2 patients under self-isolation and had recovered from Covid-19.

"This shows us that we can start to live with Covid-19. The strategy going forward with living with Covid is to make sure of course the healthcare capacity is enough, more importantly is to ensure we are able to protect those at highest risk.

"For people who have very minimal health issues and those aged below 60, if you get Covid now, chances are you will get infected with the Omicron variant.

"If you are triple vaccinated (boosted), chances are your Covid-19 illness will just be Category 2 - mild symptoms and you can recover at home.

"What we are most concerned about are elderly people, people who are immunocompromised, and those with critical illnesses and this is the group of people that we must protect."

He said this would be done through vaccination by ensuring patients, especially those with chronic illness who had been boosted, which could be a challenge.

Khairy said Malaysia had aimed to ensure 70 per cent of adult population were boosted by now but it was only about 65 per cent for now.

He added that hospitals and physicians had also been instructed to look at the best clinical care pathway to treat the disease and reduce the mortality and mobility of Covid-19.

"So this is the strategy going forward. It is not to say the government is just free for all right now. No, absolutely not.

"Even if you are healthy and isolating at home, you can use MySejahtera health assessment tools where you will get reminders, SMS and calls.

"We will continue to care for people whether they are self-isolating at home or admitted at hospitals, but the focus for public healthcare right now is on the most high risk group so that we can get out of this pandemic as soon as possible."