

## Health Ministry monitoring use of antibacterial drugs, says DG

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PETALING JAYA: Buying antibiotics over the counter without proper advice can lead to an increase in antimicrobial resistance in the body, warned the Malaysian Medical Association.

Its president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said antimicrobial resistance is a worldwide problem that exists, including in Malaysia. As such, she said there is a need for continuous public education to avoid the unnecessary use of antibiotics.

“Unnecessary dispensing of antibiotics is seen (with patients) of all ages. It is against the law to purchase antibiotics without a doctor’s prescription,” Dr Azizan said.

“When antibiotics are taken unnecessarily and not taken according to instructions, it can lead to microbes developing resistance to the medication, rendering it ineffective.

“(The public) should avoid the use of broad-spectrum antibiotics, which are notorious for causing antimicrobial resistance.”

She was responding to a study showing changes in antibiotic utilisation in Malaysia during and post-Covid-19, which was published by BMC Public Health, a peer-reviewed journal on the epidemiology of disease and the understanding of all aspects of public health.

The study stated that despite higher antibiotic utilisation rates being seen in the private sector compared to their public counterparts, both sectors are in line with the World Health Organisation’s target of at least 60% of antibiotic use consisting of access antibiotics.

“These findings highlight the need for more rigorous interventions, targeting both prescribers and the public.

“Improvement strategies should focus on reducing inappropriate and unnecessary prescribing,” the study said.

Meanwhile, Health director-general Datuk Dr Muhammad Radzi Abu Hassan said the public's consumption of antibiotics is monitored through a Health Ministry programme to ensure that there is no excessive use or prescription by both public or private medical facilities.

He said the ministry's Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) programme covers public and private healthcare facilities, encompassing primary care clinics and hospitals, where antimicrobial consumption is rigorously monitored.

To address concerns regarding potential antimicrobial resistance due to excessive use, he said the ministry introduced the AMS programme, which is aimed at enhancing the prudent use of antimicrobials through a structured and coordinated methodology.

"Its core objectives include advocating for best practices, including selecting the appropriate antimicrobials, ensuring correct administration routes, determining suitable dosages and duration and mitigating harm to present and future patients," said Dr Muhammad Radzi.

According to the ministry, the AMS involves medical practitioners and experts, including physicians, microbiologists, pharmacists and infection control specialists, who monitor the use of antibiotics and how they are prescribed to the right patients for the right duration.

Dr Muhammad Radzi said the AMS provides feedback on prescription practices, antimicrobial use, medication safety incidents, local antimicrobial resistance patterns and antimicrobial resistance-related infections.

He added that the team also advises the ministry on necessary changes to antimicrobial policies and guidelines, therapeutic options and diagnostic interventions.

The AMS programme has been proven highly successful in promoting rational use of antimicrobials through evidence-based interventions, he said.