

'Hiding info on exposure an offence'

NATION 

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysians will find themselves running afoul of the law if they do not disclose information of contact with Covid-19 patients.

People who have reason to believe that they may be suffering from any infectious disease should not act in a manner which is likely to lead to the spread of such a disease, said lawyers.

Those who know or have reason to believe they are suffering from an infectious disease must not expose others by their presence or conduct in any public place, according to Section 12 of the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases (PCID) Act 1988.

Malaysian Bar president Salim Bashir expressed concern regarding several cases where Malaysians had deliberately withheld information, especially on exposure to Covid-19 patients, from hospital staff.

"Everyone who had possible contact and exposure (to Covid-19 patients) must relate the truth to healthcare staff beforehand, and not wait until clinical procedures are completed – which by then would have had the safety of hospital staff and facilities compromised.

"Members of the public must be truthful in disclosing their travel history and close contacts with Covid-19 outbreaks," he said.

He added that under Section 22(d) of the PCID Act, anyone who furnishes false information related to the Act commits an offence and has to face a penalty.

"Everyone who has a reason to believe that he or she might be infected due to possible exposure must subject himself to screening and avoid exposing others to the risk of infection.

"The individual must refrain from conducting himself in a manner that puts the public at risk. Any act of defiance is an offence," he said.

Those who are guilty of a first offence under the PCID Act could be imprisoned for up to two years or a fine or both.

Those who commit a second or subsequent offence will face up to five years of jail or a fine or both.

Those committing a continuing offence will face a fine up to RM200 for every day during which the offence continues.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr N. Ganabaskaran said the PCID Act stipulated that giving false information to a government official that leads to the possible spread of a disease is a serious offence.

“Especially during this time, providing information such as travel history and close contacts will be extremely important in ensuring the right measures are taken in infectious disease control.

“Healthcare workers during this time should also be mindful of their whereabouts and who they come into contact with outside of the hospital to ensure the highest standards of infectious disease control are maintained,” he said.

He added that if a person had recently been in contact with someone confirmed with Covid-19, they should be tested immediately or call the Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre hotline at 03-8881 0200, 03-8881 0600 or 03-8881 0700.

“They should not wait for symptoms. People should also not fear being tested as better outcomes can be achieved if they respond with urgency,” he said.

Recently, a private hospital in Kedah had to shut down for two days after a woman – who did not disclose that she lives with a Covid-19 positive relative – tested positive after delivering her baby.

In another case, a man in Melaka admitted after his pneumonia treatment that he had been in contact with a colleague who had tested positive for Covid-19.

A US study in 2018 found that about 70% of participants admitted that they had deliberately withheld information from their healthcare provider at least once.

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It is insightful

Not in my interest