

Medical experts offer their views on MCO extension

NATION 

Friday, 10 Apr 2020

KUALA LUMPUR: The movement control order (MCO) should be extended to and beyond the Hari Raya season, says the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia.

Acknowledging that many Malaysians would want to travel and spend time with their loved ones during Ramadan and Hari Raya, it however reminded the people that “the risk of spreading the virus, particularly to the elderly, in the case of a balik kampung exodus, is very real”.

“Risks associated with crowding at R&R stations and failure of social distancing by travellers during this exodus and their subsequent return to urban areas will also need to be taken into consideration,” it said in a statement.

The Academy of Medicine of Malaysia is a registered body that represents medical specialists in the country.

“For this year at least, be it Ramadan, Aidilfitri or even haj gatherings – there is a need for control, monitoring and possible banning of these gatherings,” it said.

“Responsible behaviour in adhering to social distancing measures is required of everyone until a vaccine is made available.”

The Star reported yesterday that many health experts had called for the MCO to be extended for at least another two weeks.

The academy noted that Hari Raya is expected to fall on May 24, followed by other celebrations such as Hari Gawai and Kaamatan.

A premature withdrawal or excessive relaxation of MCO restrictions would potentially undo all the good that had been achieved from staying home these past four weeks, it said.

“The war against Covid-19 is far from over. Let us show the world that Malaysians can exercise restraint as a nation and bring the war to a favourable close,” it added.

Given the need to prolong the MCO, the academy said the government should strengthen plans to ease the socio-economic repercussions of the pandemic.

“We are cognisant that this pandemic will continue to have a major negative impact on all aspects of the economy, which is why robust whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are needed,” it said.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has suggested for a “stepwise relaxation” of the MCO.

This would include businesses that may be allowed to operate with strict guidelines, public transport with limited loads and frequent disinfection, and permitted solitary public exercises, it said.

“In all cases, strict hand hygiene and physical distancing must be observed, with masks if necessary.

“Interstate travel may need to be restricted but will have to be prioritised for economic needs rather than personal.

“Large group congregations for places of worship, celebrations such as weddings, unfortunately, will have to be restricted still until the likelihood of community viral spread comes down consistently. This might take upwards of months to years.”

All such measures would need enforcement and enforcers must be given very clear guidelines, said MMA president Dr N. Ganabaskaran in a statement.

MMA said the public must also be well informed about the practical effects of such regulations.

“While relaxing movement control, we cannot afford to let up on diagnosis, isolation and treatment of Covid-19 patients.

“We will need to get point-of-care rapid tests such as we have for dengue and influenza, which we hope will be evaluated and available within a few weeks.

“We will need to look into those who have been cured or who have protective antibodies, so that perhaps these convalescent people might get ‘certificates of infection and cure’ and therefore be allowed to return quickly to work, to pursue business, to study, etc.”

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