

High number of food poisoning cases worrying, says MMA

Insufficient attention given to hygiene, food handling, says association.

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The Malaysian Medical Association is concerned with the high number of food poisoning cases in the country, especially those involving young children. – Pixabay pic, July 28, 2024.

THE Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is concerned with the high number of food poisoning cases in the country, especially those involving young children.

It added that it was clear that sufficient attention was not being given to hygiene and food handling.

The MMA said that statistics showed that in 2022, there were approximately 14,293 food poisoning cases caused by food and water borne diseases reported in Malaysia.

This was during the pandemic, but cases have been on the rise after the pandemic, said MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz.

Dr Azizan added that Health Ministry data showed cases were now more common, with 51 incidents recorded for every 100,000 people in Malaysia in 2023.

“This is more than double the rate of 18.4 incidents in 2021. One particular area we are most concerned about is food handling in the country,” she noted.

She said that the standards of food hygiene, in particular at street food outlets, need to be improved.

“It is not uncommon to see no separation in the handling of food and money.

“In many outlets, food is being prepared in unhygienic conditions while many food stalls and caterers are known to be operating illegally. The list goes on but what are the authorities doing about it?

“Occasionally, a restaurant is closed by the authorities and the owner is slapped with a fine. But we see no improvement. Everyone closes one eye and carries on.”

She said all food operators must be properly educated on the standards of food hygiene while premises where food is being prepared should be regularly inspected by the authorities.

She added that the Health Ministry must prioritise looking into these issues as food poisoning can have fatal consequences.

“Via digitalisation, the ministry should also monitor and send reminders to food and beverage sellers concerning their typhoid vaccination status.

“We urge the government to audit all typhoid vaccinations given to food handlers as there are unregistered typhoid vaccines in the market being used by unscrupulous parties,” she said.

Earlier this month, National Poison Centre (NPC) said the number of poisoning cases in Malaysia has increased, with most involving children aged below four.

NPC chief pharmacist Sulastri Samsudin said the centre has encountered an estimated 1,200 to 1,300 cases in 2024 alone.

Recently, two brothers – aged two and three – died after eating snacks laced with rat poison near their home in Labu Besar in Kulim, Kedah.

In June, 82 people suffered food poisoning after having breakfast prepared for a school programme. Two people, a 17-year-old boy and a 19-month-old girl who ate the food, died from food poisoning. – July 28, 2024.