

MMA concerned about rise of food poisoning cases in country, says president

By **IMRAN HILMY**

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has expressed concern over the spate of food poisoning cases which have occurred nationwide.

MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said the association is deeply saddened that in many of these cases, children were most affected.

"It is clear that from these reports, not enough attention is being given to hygiene and food handling," she said in a statement on Sunday (July 28).

The doctor said these food poisoning cases alone can cause hospital admissions to go up.

She also said according to the Statista Research Department, in 2022, there were approximately 14,293 food poisoning cases caused by food and waterborne diseases reported in Malaysia.

She said these numbers were during the pandemic, but cases have been on the rise in the endemic period.

Dr Azizan said that based on data from the Health Ministry, cases are now more common, with 51 incidents recorded for every 100,000 people in Malaysia last year (2023) - more than double the rate of 18.4 incidents in 2021.

She said one particular area that the association is most concerned about is the handling of food in the country.

"Our local cuisine is ranked among the best in the world but the same can't be said about our standards of food hygiene, in particular our street food.

"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.

"What are the authorities doing about it?" she asked.

She said stopping someone from earning an income from selling food, especially single mums or even single dads, might be cruel but it should be a requirement that all food sellers get a licence with the necessary certification from the authorities.

Dr Azizan emphasised of the need to have all food operators to be properly educated on the standards of food hygiene.

She said premises where food is being prepared should be regularly inspected by the authorities.

"We urge the Health Ministry to prioritise looking into these issues as food poisoning can have fatal consequences," she said.

She added Malaysians must also do their part in reporting unhygienic practices in the food industry to the authorities.

Under the law, all food premises must comply with the Food Hygiene Regulations 2009. Food handlers training is compulsory for all food handlers.

The food handler must also undergo a medical examination and receive typhoid vaccination which is compulsory for all those involved in the food and beverage industry.

Dr Azizan said 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.