

'Covid SOPs can prevent flu'

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Lingering sniffles: A good way to prevent infection is by physical distancing and wearing face masks in public. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

PETALING JAYA: With the rise of influenza-like illness (ILI) in the community, reinforcing Covid-19 preventive measures such as wearing face masks could significantly reduce infections, say experts.

Hospital Teluk Intan's Emergency and Trauma Department head Dr Samsu Ambia said there had been more patients seeking treatment for ILI recently.

"During the movement control order, we usually received about 160 daily, but in the past month, we've received over 200 patients to the emergency department daily.

"About 70 of them are referred to the fever centre and most have ILI," he added.

Dr Samsu said wearing face masks would significantly reduce respiratory infections such as ILI, which is air-borne.

“I noticed that ILI is easily transmittable when family and friends meet at home and do not wear masks.

“At the hospital where I meet patients daily, such infections are rare as every medical worker wears an N95 mask,” he added.

He encouraged schools to retain the wearing of masks to reduce ILI among students.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah said respiratory viruses such as ILI can linger on all kinds of surfaces such as grocery cart handles, doorknobs or the office coffee pot.

“The only way to prevent the spread of the illness is by maintaining physical distancing and using a face mask when in public, as well as washing your hands.

“Stay at home when you’re sick and cover your mouth when you cough,” he added.

Dr Raj Kumar encouraged people to get vaccinated against the flu, especially those above 60 years old with comorbidities, which is one of the vulnerable groups.

“With the schools now open, cross-infection can easily occur,” he said.

He added that with worsening symptoms such as high fever and thick phlegm with shortness of breath, people would need treatment and tests at general practitioner (GP) clinics.

“You’ll need to get some intervention like a blood test to see whether there is enough oxygen going into your lungs,” he said.

Malaysian Medical Association MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said ILI cases are seen in Malaysia all year round, with occasional clusters arising.

“The incidence dropped during the pandemic with the frequent lockdowns that forced people including children to stay home.

“Coupled with the various Covid-19 SOPs (standard operating procedures), cases were reduced.

“However, with everything opening up, it is no surprise to see an increase in ILI,” he added.

Dr Koh said to help prevent infection among children, parents should ensure the personal hygiene of their children, which includes wearing face masks.

“Maintain a healthy lifestyle to ensure that your bodies can stave off such infections and, if infected, you will recover quickly,” he added.

On Saturday, it was reported that the Selangor Health Department had detected an increase in ILI in educational institutions, especially boarding schools, over the past two weeks.

The next day, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said ILI cases in the country are currently under control despite the rising number.