

# Keep clean, stay vigilant against HFMD

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*Koh ... HFMD is a seasonal disease.*

**PETALING JAYA:** Practising good personal and general hygiene will go a long way to help stem the rise in hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD).

"Hygiene plays a large role as the viruses causing HFMD can be spread by coughing and sneezing, contact with contaminated surfaces as well as contact with fluid from blisters and faeces," Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai told *theSun*.

Koh was commenting on reports released by the Health Ministry (MOH), stating that Malaysia had recorded 31,661 cases of HFMD – 15 times the number that was recorded within the same period in 2021.

Last year, the country only recorded 2,121 cases in the same epidemiology week report.

When asked if Malaysians are beginning to forget about staying hygienic, Koh said it is to the contrary.

"I don't think that it is because Malaysians are beginning to forget about the need to maintain hygiene.

"It is because children are not able to effectively practise social distancing in schools, and though hygiene is being taught to the young ones, it may not be that easy for them to embrace it."

Koh also noted that HFMD is a seasonal disease which spreads by close contact with another person who has the disease.

"During the pandemic, when we were in frequent lockdowns with children mostly staying at home, the spread of HFMD was at a minimum. With schools and kindergartens opening up, it is no surprise the current number of cases is much higher than that of last year."

He also noted that there is no lack of awareness among parents and guardians when it comes to this disease.

"The public has mostly been concentrating on Covid-19 to the extent that they may have forgotten about other infectious diseases, including dengue."

However, Kuala Selangor member of Parliament cum chairman of Pakatan Harapan health committee Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said there is a lack of awareness among parents and those running pre-schools about the disease.

"We now see the perils of reduced health promotion and awareness," he said.

"This shows the importance of health knowledge transfer to the general public and how no one disease should take precedence over another."

He added that hygiene plays a critical role, and it is important to place emphasis on it not only at home but also in schools.

"The problem is multi-sectoral, involving not only MOH but other relevant agencies, state and local councils.

"We need to understand that it takes years of education and practice to nurture good habits.

"This is where health promotion should not be done in a lax manner. We have failed to promote good public health preventive measures, and the numbers

are a good reminder, if not an outright wake-up call for all of us, especially those in positions of power and influence.”

Dzulkefly added that it was interesting that the ministry made the comparison in the number of cases between 2021 and this year, as most of the time last year was spent indoors and most nurseries were closed.

“So logically, we can see that there is a real spike in the number of cases this year. As much attention was focused on Covid-19, the surveillance and active case detection of other diseases had dipped.”