

# Mask up, Omicron XBB variant has high infection rate: Health DG

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*The Health DG has advised the public to wear face masks both indoors and outdoors to avoid getting infected. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN*

**PETALING JAYA:** The Health Ministry has warned of a growing public risk from the Omicron XBB variant of Covid-19.

Health Director-General Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said reinfections of Covid-19 with this variant has increased to 17% compared with only 5% for basic Omicron.

“Please take precautions, especially in crowded places, during the campaigning period, polling on Nov 19 and even afterwards as the Omicron XBB variant has a high infection rate.

“I strongly encourage the public to wear face masks both indoors and outdoors.

"Many are complacent and take it for granted that they will not get infected. This puts them and others at risk. So long as there is this incorrect mindset, the chain of infection will not end as Omicron variants continue to mutate in our communities," he told *theSun* yesterday.

Noor Hisham said his warning stems from daily Covid-19 case projections, which show a possible increase in infections this month and in December due to the Omicron variant.

"Public health measures are strongly encouraged, such as wearing face masks when in crowded places, and narrow and closed spaces. Also, wash your hands frequently with hand sanitiser. Do all these things, which we have been recommending since the beginning of the pandemic.

"Please also get a booster dose, especially those of you who are at high risk. Reinfections of Covid-19 with the Omicron XBB variant increased to 17% compared with only 5% for the basic Omicron, so the public must be extremely careful not to get infected."

Noor Hisham said while the ministry continues to monitor the situation, the public must help to break the chain of infection by carrying out the "test, report, inform, identify and seek treatment" methodology and practise self-compliance to prevent being infected with the virus.

He said if there is a significant surge in cases, enforcement actions will be reimplemented.

"So those who refuse to obey simple instructions and advice are taking the risk of infection and reinfection upon themselves, their loved ones and other innocent people," he added.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said the use of face masks is highly recommended at a time when

politicians are campaigning and many gatherings are held throughout the country as the general election on Nov 19 draws near.

“Candidates nominated for the general election should carry out self-tests and always wear face masks when meeting constituents during campaigning. The country may be transitioning to endemicity but Covid-19 never left us, so we need to protect the vulnerable.”

Muruga said ignoring the advice of medical experts will compromise the health of the elderly community and those with comorbidities and underlying medical conditions such as diabetes and lung diseases, who can still be at risk of getting severe Covid-19 symptoms and requiring hospitalisation.

“So, the right thing to do would be to take the necessary precautions. I don’t think any of the candidates want to risk contracting the virus at this time and be left with no option but to cut short their campaigning. To avoid this, they would be wise to take precautions,” he said.