

Mixed views on Ramadan bazaar restriction move

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Medical experts advise people to get vaccinated before visiting Ramadan bazaars. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

PETALING JAYA: The call to ban children and those above 65 years from entering Ramadan bazaars has received mixed reactions from medical experts.

While some believe they should not be allowed entry to such crowded places, others do not see a reason.

Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy founder and chief executive officer Azrul Mohd Khalib said he does not see the need to ban children below 12 from going to bazaars.

“Due to the open air nature of Ramadan bazaars, there is less risk involved and contagion is less likely,” he said.

However, Azrul noted that the congested environment at popular bazaars, such as the one in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, does raise concerns that unvaccinated children below 12 years could be vulnerable to infection.

Based on Health Ministry data, the admission of children to paediatric intensive care units due to Covid-19 infections last month had risen by 94% for Categories 3 to 5, with a spike of 200 and 125 cases in Categories 4 and 5, respectively.

Nevertheless, he said while children could get infected, they are also more likely than adults to have mild symptoms and make a complete recovery.

"I don't believe in banning those above 65 from visiting these bazaars because, if we banned everything considered dangerous or risky for those above 65, the list would include activities like exercising at the gym and even driving," he said.

As a reminder, he stressed that the chances of unvaccinated individuals dying from a Covid-19 infection are 62 times higher than those who had received both primary vaccinations and booster jabs.

"The possibility of an unvaccinated person contracting the virus is also nine times higher in comparison with those who have taken at least the primary jabs.

"Children could get infected but they are also more likely than adults to just have mild symptoms and recover," he said.

In contrast to Azrul, Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai said as there are still many children eligible for vaccinations who have yet to get it, parents should be discouraged from bringing their young children along to Ramadan bazaars.

"Those who are too young to be vaccinated (five and below) may be at risk of infection and can spread the disease to others," he said. However, he added that some parents may not have an option as they may not have someone to babysit their children.

"We also don't want to have situations where the children are left locked in the car, while their parents are off to the bazaar. This will lead to other issues. If the parents do not have any other option, their children need to remain close at hand and not loiter around the premises. Don't forget, children can also go missing in these crowded places," he said.

As for those above 65, Koh said although we may be transitioning into endemicity, this group is still at risk of severe Covid-19 infections.

"It would be advisable for those in this group who have not received their booster shots to get it before visiting Ramadan bazaars. A safer option would be to purchase food from a less crowded shop or to buy their food before more people arrive at the bazaars," he said.

Koh also said we should not be looking at banning them from entry into the bazaars as there are senior citizens who live alone and may need to go out to get their food themselves.