

New way to release Covid data lauded

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Khairy said daily infection figures would now be released together with other relevant data.

PETALING JAYA: A move to allay public fear by releasing all Covid data together rather than in bits and pieces has received the thumbs up from health experts.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin announced last week that the daily tally of infections would henceforth be released together with other relevant data.

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He said the intention was to take the edge off the impact that a sharp increase in infections daily would have on the "fear factor".

Universiti Malaya professor of epidemiology and public health Dr Sanjay Rampal described the plan as well-intentioned, while Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai believes it would ensure accurate reporting.

Previously, the number of new daily infections were announced every afternoon while the data on fatalities, hospital occupancy, intensive care capacity and the number of patients who need respiratory assistance were only released the following day.

These figures will now be released every morning.

Sanjay said the change in messaging approach is consistent with the evolving evidence that the Omicron waves will result in a higher number of cases but fewer serious infections.

“The overall messaging has to be more consistent with the burden placed on us by this disease.”

Sanjay pointed out that some messages that promote certain standard operating procedures (SOP) such as the need to wear face masks and to get vaccinated “tend to highlight the excessive burden on everyone”.

“That is likely to intensify fear,” he said, adding that relaxing the SOP could take away some of the pressure.

Sanjay said the messaging direction has made the transition from its focus on the total number of new infections every day to highlighting healthcare utilisation.

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Koh said the move to stop releasing infection figures every afternoon would give the authorities more time to review data to ensure that it is accurate before being sent out to the public.

“The fear factor will depend on how the data is viewed by the public. They need to be reassured that there is transparency in the reports given out and that it is not a move to delay the release of data on positive cases,” he told *theSun*.

Koh said the move to include data on hospital occupancy rates, ICU utilisation, fatality rates and a breakdown of cases by category also gave a clearer picture of the current situation of the pandemic.

“The people will appreciate such detailed reports instead of just the data on new cases each day. Ultimately, this data will not mean a lot to us when we enter the endemic stage of the Covid-19 crisis,” he said.