

# No immediate need for mass monkeypox vaccination: Health experts

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**PETALING JAYA:** There is no immediate need for mass vaccination against monkeypox, despite its spread in several European and African countries, said health experts.

Virologist Assoc Prof Dr Chee Hui Yee told *theSun* that monkeypox, which is a zoonotic disease, is also less transmissible compared with the well-known chickenpox and deadly smallpox.

"I believe there is no immediate need for mass vaccinations to be carried out unless the individual is from a high-risk category. For example, he may have travelled to highly endemic countries or have been in close contact with someone who contracted the virus."

Chee said she sees no reason for the government to close international borders as monkeypox is only spread through close contact and even then, not as rapidly as Covid-19.

She was commenting on Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Noor Azmi Ghazali's comment that the government would not close the country's borders despite cases of monkeypox being detected in several countries.

Similarly, Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai said it would not be wise to close borders for now as there is a need to base our decisions on the scientific data that is being collected through worldwide surveillance of the disease.

"We have all experienced firsthand the disastrous effects of prematurely closing our borders. The country needs to maintain its preparedness for any pandemic, and one must continue to maintain a high standard of personal hygiene to ward off monkeypox and any other infectious diseases."

Koh said the smallpox vaccine has been found to be effective against monkeypox, and it should be noted that there is no readily available commercial supply of the vaccine as smallpox was declared an eradicated disease by the World Health Assembly in 1980.

"There is a vaccine that has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2019 for use against monkeypox. Our Health Ministry has said it is looking into the procurement of this vaccine for targeted usage and not mass vaccination.

"This is a relatively new vaccine. It is not available for use in large quantities, and this places limitations on its usage in mass vaccination programmes.

"A decision on mass vaccination for any disease will have to take into account its potential harm and also the risk or benefit ratio of the vaccine concerned, not to mention the high cost involved leading to a decision that is also based on a cost and benefit ratio. Although every life is priceless, these are indices that will affect decisions moving forward," he said.

Universiti Malaya professor of epidemiology and public health Dr Sanjay Rampal referred to monkeypox as a self-limiting disease that typically resolves on its own.

"It is unlikely to cause large outbreaks because the virus does not spread easily from person to person.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that many older Malaysians have received smallpox vaccination many decades ago.

"A mass vaccination campaign is not indicated because the risk of human-to-human transmission and the risk of severe disease is low.

"Also, the smallpox vaccination is unlikely to stop transmission of monkeypox," he said, adding that the Health Ministry has prepared sufficiently for this virus.

Monkeypox is known to be less transmissible compared with chickenpox and smallpox.