

Reinforce Malaysia's Plan Against Omicron — MHC

By CodeBlue | 10 February 2022

Although Omicron is less deadly than Delta, there is still a significant risk to vulnerable segments the population, the unvaccinated, and the unboosted.



The Malaysian Health Coalition (MHC) is concerned with the [increasing number of Covid-19 cases](#) with the advent of the Omicron wave. The Health Minister has [predicted](#) that Malaysia may see an [infectivity rate of 1.6 and a daily caseload of 30,000](#) by March 2022 if no proper measures are imposed by the government.

We urge the following:

Accelerate Non-Mandatory Vaccination Programme For Children

We support the government's launch of the Covid-19 vaccination programme for children between 5-11 years old, with Malaysia joining the ranks of other countries such as [Singapore](#), [Saudi Arabia](#), and [Australia](#) that have planned to expand Covid-19 vaccinations for children.

The schedule comprises two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's Cominarty vaccine, administered eight weeks apart. We ask the government to consider reducing the interval between these two doses to three weeks for children with comorbidities.

We also expect a well-executed children's vaccination programme to protect vulnerable children of all socio-economic classes. We must protect children, given that [school clusters](#) are increasing upon the reopening of schools in 2022.

While there exist side effects from vaccinations, they appear to be rare, and so the government must increase their risk communication efforts with parents to increase vaccine confidence.

Amplify Local Covid-19 Genomic Surveillance

From November 2021 until January 2022, based on the GISAID database, Malaysia sequenced only [0.48 per cent](#) of all positive Covid-19 cases. This is less than the United Kingdom at 8.2 per cent and Singapore at 2.1 per cent.

Malaysia needs more genomic surveillance, especially with the surging number of Omicron cases. We urge the government to invest in outsourcing genomic surveillance to private laboratories and build meaningful collaborations among the Institute of Medical Research (IMR) and university laboratories.

This will boost whole genome sequencing (WGS) capacity to identify Omicron cases and other emerging variants. As viruses are constantly mutating, understanding the degree of the threat of a variant can help build the right public health measures. We have also highlighted this matter in our previous [joint statement](#) dated December 15, 2021.

Increase Availability Of Antiviral Drugs

We urge the government to increase the availability of US Food and Drug Administration-approved [antiviral drugs](#) such as Nirmatrelvir and Molnupiravir in Malaysia as part of managing Covid-19.

This must be supported by clear clinical protocols to decide what drugs doctors can prescribe, and which patients should receive these expensive antiviral drugs.

The poor or those in rural areas must not be discriminated against when it comes to the availability of such drugs. We caution the government to be mindful of the unintended consequences of widely available antiviral drugs, such as ignoring SOPs or vaccinations. Therefore, crisis communication efforts must be in place to ensure the *rakyat* remains vigilant.

Although Omicron is less deadly than Delta, there is still a significant risk to vulnerable segments of the population, the unvaccinated, and the unboosted. We urge the public and the government to take Omicron seriously and strengthen their two-way communication to ensure the public follows relevant SOPs and the TRIIS framework of the Health Ministry (Test, Report, Isolate, Inform and Seek Help).

The Malaysia Health Coalition (MHC) comprises the following members:

- *Academy of Medicine Malaysia*
- *Association of Malaysian Optometrists*
- *College of Anaesthesiologists*
- *College of Ophthalmologists*
- *College of Surgeons Academy of Medicine of Malaysia*
- *Dermatology Society of Malaysia*
- *IKRAM Health Malaysia*
- *Lung Cancer Network of Malaysia*
- *Malaysian Association for Bronchology and Interventional Pulmonology*
- *Malaysian Association of Clinical Biochemists*
- *Malaysian Medical Association*
- *Malaysian Paediatric Association*
- *Malaysian Pharmacists Society*
- *Malaysian Public Health Physician Association*
- *Malaysian Society for Harm Reduction*
- *Malaysian Society of Anaesthesiologists*
- *Malaysian Society of Clinical Psychology*
- *Malaysian Society of Intensive Care*
- *Malaysian Society of Occupational Safety and Health*
- *Malaysian Society of Ophthalmology*
- *Malaysian Thoracic Society*
- *Medical Mythbusters Malaysia*
- *Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia*
- *Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Malaysia*
- *Perinatal Society of Malaysia*
- *Public Health Malaysia*

- *Assoc Prof Dr Uma Devi Palanisamy*
- *Dr Jahizah Hassan*
- *Dr Amar Singh-HSS*
- *Dr Khor Swee Kheng*
- *Prof Dr Mohd Zamrin Dimon*
- *Prof Dr Roslina Abdul Manap*
- *Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh*
- *Prof Dr Zaleha Abdullah Mahdy*