MMA proposes 20-30% cut in added sugar to curb diabetes crisis

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The Malaysian Medical Association says this should be supported by a broader sugar tax and clearer front-of-pack nutrition labelling.



MMA president Dr R Thirunavukarasu said Malaysia must immediately cut down on added sugar in food and drinks. (Rawpixel pic)

PETALING JAYA:

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) today urged the government to enforce a 20-30% reduction in added sugar across manufactured food and beverages over the next three to five years, warning that Malaysia is facing a diabetes crisis.

MMA president Dr R Thirunavukarasu said the target was achievable and aligned with global practice, and should be supported by a broader sugar tax and clearer front-of-pack nutrition labelling.

“We must immediately cut down on sugar in our food and drinks. The food and beverage industry has to be part of the solution, not the problem,” he said in a statement in conjunction with World Diabetes Day.

His call followed a Star report noting that Malaysia now ranks 13th globally and the highest in Southeast Asia for diabetes prevalence, with 21% of Malaysians, or one in five adults, living with the disease.

Thirunavukarasu also noted the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023’s finding that 15.6% of adults have diabetes, with more than half overweight or obese.

He said Malaysia must urgently shift towards early detection, beginning with annual health screenings for all adults from the age of 18 to prevent any serious complications.

Thirunavukarasu also warned that poorly controlled diabetes would lead to long-term conditions such as kidney failure, heart disease, amputations, blindness and stroke, which impose heavy financial and emotional burdens on families and the healthcare system.

He called for stronger public health education through schools, the workplace and the media, saying lifestyle change begins with better understanding of healthy eating, physical activity and the risk of diabetes.

“Health is everyone’s responsibility. Only through a united, whole-of-society effort can we turn the tide against diabetes and protect the well-being of future generations,” he said.