

TRENDING



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'More deaths if no total lockdown'

By [Veena Babulal](#) - May 21, 2021 @ 9:00am

64



Soldiers laying out barbed wire at a field ICU for Covid-19 patients at Kepala Batas Hospital, Penang, yesterday. - NSTP/DANIAL SAAD

The government must be prepared for an exponential rise in deaths and a collapse in healthcare services if it does not impose a total lockdown in Malaysia promptly.

Epidemiologist Dr Malina Osman, a public health expert from Universiti Putra Malaysia, said the writing was on the wall with 331 deaths recorded over the past seven days (up to yesterday) and a 11 per cent increase in cases over the same period.

"If we don't impose at least a two-week full lockdown from midnight, we could be dealing with a lot more deaths."

She declined to disclose the number of deaths or the rate of the spike that her models had projected for fear that it would happen.

Last month, Dr Malina predicted that active cases would reach 50,000 by mid-May if a ban on activities that did not involve mask wearing was allowed.

Up to yesterday, active cases stood at 50,171.

"The sacrifice, lockdown, economic pressure and the emergency"

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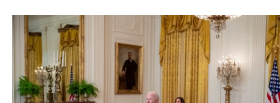
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The sacrifices, lockdowns, economic pressures and the emergency imposed will be pointless because all it would have done was prevent elections.

"A huge loss of lives would happen anyway because we refused to impose a full MCO at a crucial juncture."

She said it would not be long before doctors would be forced to choose who got to be warded in Intensive Care Units (ICU), as the ICU capacity for treating Covid-19 patients had reached 89 per cent in the Klang Valley and 74 per cent nationwide up to Tuesday.

Four-fifths of Covid-19 ICU beds in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kedah, Sarawak, and Negri Sembilan have been taken up.

"We do not want to go the way of India, where people are dying on the streets and doctors have to choose who gets treated and who don't in critical wards."

She said the RM5 billion spent on procuring and distributing vaccines would also not be optimised if the National Security Council did not impose a total lockdown as soon as possible, as deaths would continue to rise.

She said the situation was critical as the number of daily cases might not reflect the true picture due to widespread community transmission, with the Health Ministry's testing and tracing resources pitted against an overwhelming number of cases.



Dr Malina Osman.

Universiti Malaya professor of epidemiology and public health Dr Sanjay Rampal said Malaysia could have logged more than 10,000 daily cases as far back as two to three weeks ago.

"We've noticed an increase in ICU and ventilator use by Covid-19 patients alongside an increased frequency in deaths. This is likely due to a much



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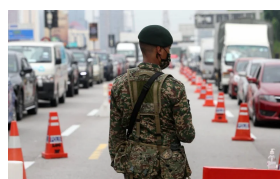


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higher incidence of cases compared with reported cases.

"We may have had more than 10,000 daily cases for the past two to three weeks and this may have continued rising since, based on the active transmission of the disease (Rt).

"The reasons for the difference between this and the reported numbers are due to screening and testing, as active community transmissions mean our screening strategy is less likely to detect those with mild symptoms or those who are asymptomatic."

Several health practitioners also shared this view, he added.

This is also based on the assumption that the median time for a patient to die is around 17 days from the onset of the illness.



Dr Sanjay Rampal

Former deputy health director-general Professor Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman drew on this theory in his social media posts, adding that it was likely as Malaysia's Covid-19 fatality rate was around 0.3 per cent.

Dr Lokman said the Health Ministry's earlier policy to restrict testing to all contacts had attributed to this discrepancy.

Dr Sanjay said he did not expect an end to the increasing number of cases based on current measures.

"There is a large proportion of unvaccinated residents and it appears that our capacity to effectively contact trace, manage outbreaks, conduct tests and notify cases is overwhelmed.

"These are important in controlling the outbreak."

He said a "total MCO" between six and eight weeks might be needed for regions where healthcare services are overwhelmed.

"The duration and frequency of MCOs may be shortened when we strengthen the capacity of our public healthcare services by increasing

the size of teams for contact tracing and in outbreak management."

On the increase in mortality rates, he said it was less likely due to new strains, but said any drop in healthcare quality due to an overwhelmed system could contribute to this.

"The direct result of an overwhelmed system is a higher risk of mortality among category 4 (pneumonia patients requiring oxygen) and 5 (those requiring breathing assistance) Covid-19 patients.

"The indirect effect in the escalation of non-communicable diseases may be felt for decades."

Earlier Dr Malina joined the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry's Covid-19 Epidemiological Analysis and Strategies Task Force chairman Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud in saying that economy was not a zero sum game as a rise in cases would cause many more businesses and industries to fold.

She said the government should roll out aid packages for those whose livelihoods were adversely affected by the lockdown.

On the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme, she said the initiative appeared "sluggish" and urged the authorities to inoculate at least 40 per cent of the population to get back into a marginal safe zone.

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