'Vaccinate and live with the virus'



















NATION

Thursday, 15 Jul 2021

PETALING JAYA: Malaysians have been living with the Covid-19 pandemic for more than 18 months and health experts now say the virus is "here to stay". However, the transition to live with the virus in the new normal will have to start with vaccinations.

In such a scenario, people will be allowed to go about their daily lives but will have to adhere to strict standard operating procedures, said Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah.

"We will need to maintain our personal hygiene, wear masks and practise social distancing whenever possible."

"If we feel sick, we need to quarantine ourselves," he said.

Dr Raj added that self-test kits would allow for easier and faster methods of testing.

"They should also vaccinate the people at a faster rate so that even if we contract Covid-19, the effects will be minimal and hospitalisation may not be required. As such, our hospital and healthcare workers will not be overwhelmed.

"Transmission rates will be reduced. So we will see a reduction in cases as well as severity and mortality rates," he said.











For those who have been fully vaccinated, he said they should be offered ease of travel, while those intending to enter the country should be allowed entry if they test negative or are fully vaccinated.

Dr Rai said the transition to living in the new normal should start immediately.

"The Covid-19 pandemic is endemic as the virus has been around for more than 18 months with the capability to mutate and survive in the community," he said.

"The virus is here to stay and we should educate the masses. To live with the virus, there need to be new acceptable agreements between the government, businesses and the people."

Dr Raj said people should not be given false hope that Covid-19 will go away.

"It is just like the common flu; we have accepted it as endemic and we go ahead with our daily lives.

"High-risk groups and the elderly get vaccinated annually for the flu as the flu virus also mutates," he said.

He added that others get treated and move on with their daily lives, while those who need to be hospitalised after a severe flu attack get appropriate treatment.

In an opinion piece in Singapore's The Straits Times on June 24, the country's Covid-19 task force members – Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong, Finance Minister Lawrence Wong and Health Minister Ong Ye Kung – said that they were drawing up a roadmap to transit to a new normal, noting that the virus was very likely to become "endemic".

They said vaccination was key as it had shown that vaccines had been effective in reducing infection and transmission.

Additionally, they said testing and surveillance would continue as they moved to make testing faster and easier.

They also pointed out that the collective social responsibility of Singaporeans remained critical, noting that the practice of good personal hygiene and consideration towards one another by avoiding crowds would reduce transmissions of the virus.

In the new normal, they mentioned that infected persons could recover at home and mass contact tracing and quarantining may not be need Privacy - Terms











Instead of monitoring daily Covid-19 infections, they said they would focus on other outcomes such as ICU admissions.

They added that large gatherings may also resume while businesses could be assured that their operations would not be disrupted.

People, too, would once again be allowed to travel.

Recently, even National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme coordinating minister Khairy Jamaluddin had said that Covid-19 is most probably going to be endemic with the possibility of requiring regular vaccination like the flu jab.

Malaysian Medical Association president Prof Datuk Dr Subramaniam Muniandy said a new normal would mean that enough of the population is vaccinated to reduce transmission, severe symptoms from the disease and deaths to very low levels.

"We can only transition to living with the virus when Covid-19 cases no longer take up the majority of beds in hospitals and ICUs," he said.

Malaysian Pharmacists Society president Amrahi Buang said living with the virus is nothing new and should have been done much earlier.

"The virus is already in the community. We should see how countries such as Japan, Taiwan and China are handling the virus," he said.

The new normal, Amrahi said, means ensuring that the majority of the population is vaccinated as fast as possible while still maintaining public health measures.

These public health measures include avoiding crowded and confined places as well as practising social distancing, washing hands and wearing face masks.

In light of the emergence of Covid-19 variants, Singapore's Temasek Foundation has given out oximeters to every household in the island nation, but Dr Subramaniam is of the opinion that not everyone in Malaysia needs it.

However, he said an oximeter could be loaned to those who are quarantined at home while Dr Raj felt that it would only be needed by vulnerable groups such as those with non-communicable diseases and the elderly.

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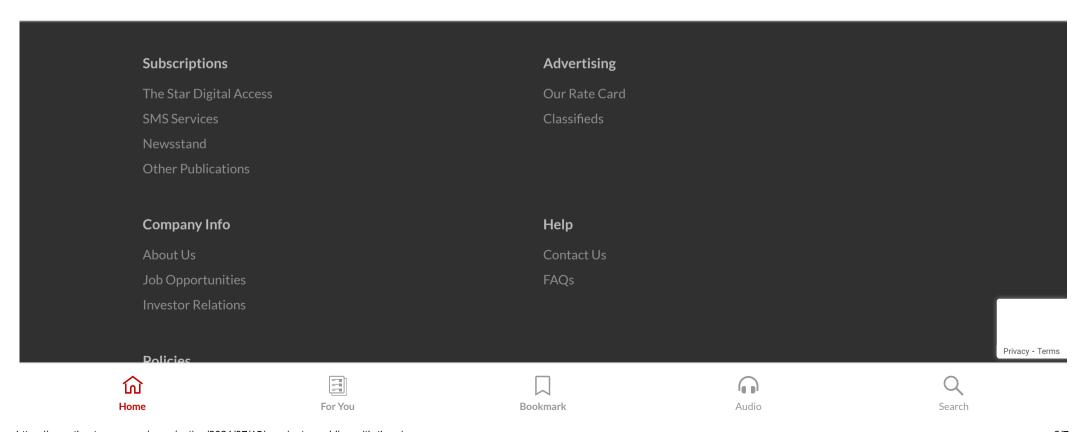
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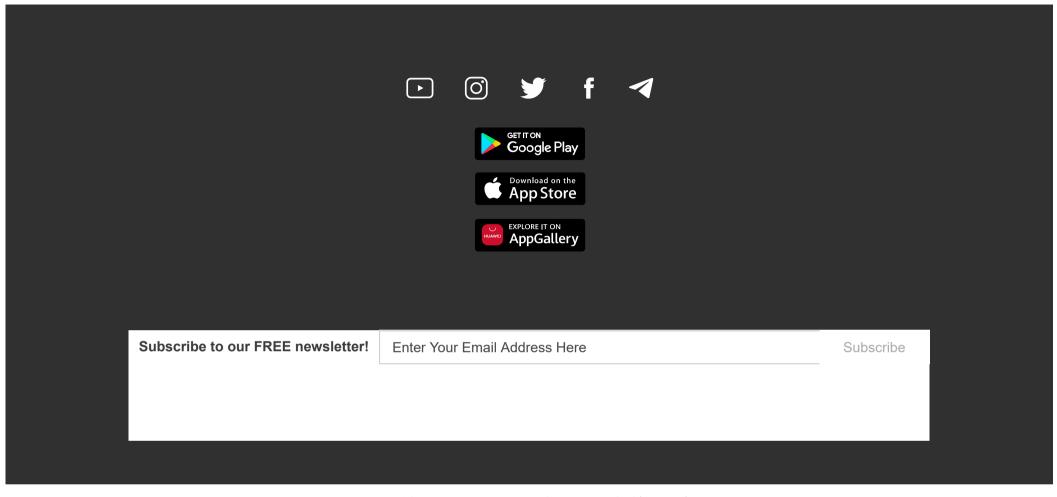
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