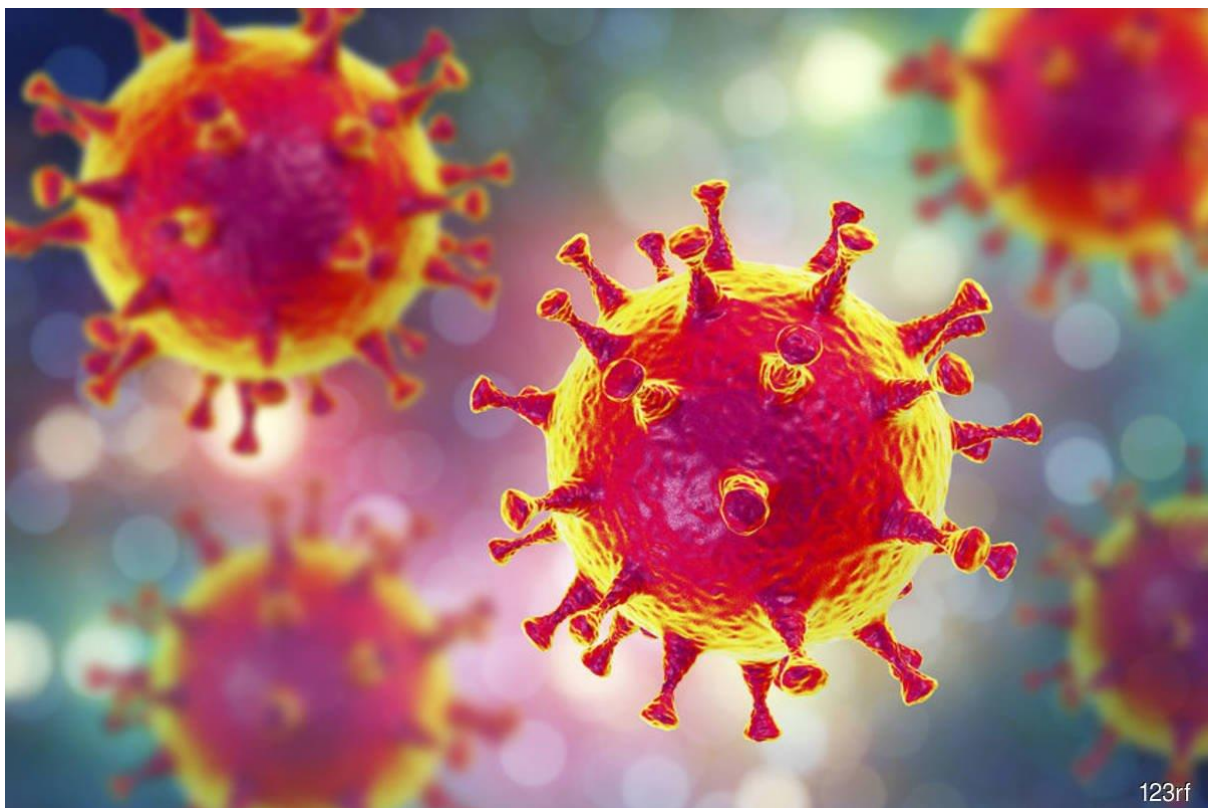


RM15 mil in additional funds for third phase of SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance project

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May 09, 2022 20:27 pm +08



PUTRAJAYA (May 9): An additional fund of RM15 million under the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (PICK) has been approved for the third phase of the SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance project, said the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI).

It said in a statement on Monday (May 9) that the SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance project was very important and strategic to identify and monitor SARS-CoV-2 virus variants in Malaysia, especially variants of concern (VOC) such as Omicron and Delta.

The first phase was conducted from Sept 1, 2021 to March 2022 while the second phase from March to Sept 2022.

According to MOSTI, Malaysia had conducted the SARS-CoV-2 virus genome sequencing on 15,565 samples between Sept 1, 2021 and April 27, 2022 to identify major Covid-19 variants in the country.

The genome sequencing was carried out by laboratories under MOSTI, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) through the SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance project, it said.

"Of the total samples, 7,245 samples or 46.55% were identified as Delta variants; 6,374 samples or 40.95% were Omicron; Beta (283 samples or 1.82%), Alpha (33 samples or 0.21%) and the rest were other variants.

"These samples were selected by the MOH and taken from all states in Malaysia. The genomic information of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been uploaded onto the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID) database," it said.

MOSTI said a consortium of 11 laboratories coordinated by the Malaysia Genome Institute-National Institutes of Biotechnology Malaysia (MGVI-NIBM) aimed to sequence an additional 15,000 SARS-CoV-2 virus genomes.

The consortium of 11 laboratories consists of MGVI-NIBM under MOSTI, the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) under MOH and nine laboratories under MOHE including Institute of Health and Community Medicine from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Sains Malaysia Hospital, Universiti Putra Malaysia Teaching Hospital and Universiti Malaysia Sabah Biotechnology Research Institute.

"The genomic Information of the SARS-CoV-2 variants is very important for the government to take appropriate and specific action to control and curb the spread of related variants.

"Currently, the genomic surveillance rate for our country is still less than 1%, however Phase 3 is part of the positive efforts to achieve at least 1% genomic surveillance rate as targeted by the government," it said.