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Proceed Cautiously with the Johor State Elections

The Malaysian Health Coalition (MHC) is concerned with the [surging number](#) of COVID-19 cases since 1 Feb 2022. Despite patients with Omicron generally presenting with milder symptoms, the number of patients admitted to hospitals is also increasing. Although the Ministry of Health (MOH) has stressed that this has “[not strained the national health system](#)”, we urge the government to proceed cautiously with the Johor state elections.

This means we should:

1. Implement safer voting practices and ban physical campaigning

The Election Commission must significantly enhance Malaysia’s voting and election process to ensure that every citizen can meet their democratic duty during a pandemic. In the Johor election, we believe that physical campaigning should be banned, and enforcement be strict and fair. The Commission should also immediately begin implementing new mechanisms to enable more comprehensive postal or electronic voting, while protecting against fraud.

2. Take vaccine boosters and increase SOP enforcement

We urge all Malaysians to get boosted, as there is strong evidence that boosters will protect against Omicron. At the same time, we urge all parties to lead by example during election campaigning. After two years of Covid, there should be no instances of leaders flouting SOPs and being fined. We also urge the MOH to work with the Election Commission to ensure smarter health SOPs are in place for the Johor elections. These smarter SOPs are especially important because Malaysia will need to hold a General Election before May 2023, and the experience in Johor can help us build better General Election SOPs.

3. Consider postponing the Johor elections if the situation drastically worsens

Although the Melaka and Sarawak elections in Nov-Dec 2021 did not lead to a rise in cases, the situation is different in Feb-Mar 2022. One, the Omicron wave started after the Sarawak elections, and Omicron is more infectious. Two, our booster rate in 2022 is slower than the primary vaccinations rate in 2021. Three, Johor will see more registered voters moving around the state, with Undi18 implemented for the first time, 2X and 5X more than Sarawak and Melaka respectively. If the epidemiological situation worsens, we will have to consider the drastic step of postponing the elections.

The MHC understands the importance of elections. However, emerging evidence shows that the increase in case numbers may affect the capacity of Malaysian healthcare workers to cope. Therefore, it is crucial to implement safer voting practices, ban physical campaigning, increase SOP enforcement, and consider postponing the elections if the public health situation drastically worsens.

BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA.

Malaysian Health Coalition (Full Signature List on myhealthcoalition.org)

25 February 2022

Full signature list:

Organisations

1. Academy of Medicine Malaysia
2. Association of Malaysian Optometrists
3. College of Anaesthesiologists
4. Dermatology Society of Malaysia
5. IKRAM Health Malaysia
6. Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia
7. Lung Cancer Network of Malaysia
8. Malaysian Association for Bronchology and Interventional Pulmonology
9. Malaysian Association of Clinical Biochemists
10. Malaysian Association of Environmental Health
11. Malaysian Coalition on Ageing
12. Malaysian Nurses Association
13. Malaysian Pharmacists Society
14. Malaysian Public Health Physicians' Association
15. Malaysian Society of Anaesthesiologists
16. Malaysian Society of Clinical Psychology
17. Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine
18. Malaysian Society of Occupational Safety and Health
19. Malaysian Thoracic Society
20. Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia
21. MedTweetMy
22. Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Malaysia
23. Public Health Malaysia

Individuals

1. Assoc Prof Dr Uma Devi Palanisamy
2. Dato' Dr Amar Singh-HSS
3. Dato' Dr Jahizah Hassan
4. Dr Khor Swee Kheng
5. Prof Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail
6. Prof Dr Asri Said
7. Prof Dr Roslina Abdul Manap
8. Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh
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