

Malaysia Experience in Tackling Covid19: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 remains a worldwide pandemic. This is obviously due to new cases increasing and made worse by co-existing medical problems including death. The main issues in the management are movement control order and screening of the disease at an early stage in order to prevent transmission, complications and treat them early. The incidence of Covid-19 in Malaysia is on a relentless march superseding any previous projections made by WHO. From December 2009 till March 2020 the rate of infection in the number of patients with Covid-19 has stayed high. Every effort should be made to slow and flatten this transmission and what better way than to focus on Malaysians' health. In the meantime society and the country as a whole has to bear the immense health and economic burden of the disease. The aim of the review was to describe the acceptance on Covid-19 in Malaysia. An extensive literature review of acceptance, knowledge, attitude, practice and decision making was performed to highlight the issues related with Covid-19. It is hoped that with the evidence, can facilitate us for better understanding.

Keywords: Covid 19, worldwide pandemic, transmission

INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been an increasing concern regarding on global issue, Covid-19 which keep on spreading among the populace and surpassed hundred people in a short time. Almost 100 countries have been affected, included Malaysia since the transmission was from human to human close contact, exposed to sneezing, coughing, respiratory droplets, or aerosols¹. Each individual who had the symptom should do the screening tests. In March 2020, Malaysia made it clear that the government did not intend to regulate the charge of Covid-19 test in private hospitals. The government hospital costs of RM700 per head was paid by the government, while in private hospital it cost in range of RM500 until RM700 per head, which need to be paid by ourselves².

According to the MOH frequently asked questions about movement control, people who want to undergo a Covid-19 test but have no symptom scan directly go to a private hospital for the screening test. However, the Covid-19 screening test service will be charged by the private company. Meanwhile, the prime minister also believed that private hospitals had the social responsibility not to add any extra charges on a sample test and should be fair. MOH also announced that the service was provided by private parties such as Bookdoc, Pantai Premier Pathology Sdn Bhd, Lablink (M) Sdn Bhd (KPJ), Qualitas Medical Group Sdn Bhd, Gleneagles Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur Hospital Beach, Cheras Hospital Beach, Klang Beach Hospital, Ayer Keroh Hospital Beach, Malacca; Twin Tower Medical Center, KLCC and Doctor On Call^{2,3}.

Malaysia has declared to impose a Movement Control Order (MCO) effective March 18 to June 9 nationwide to curb the spread of Covid-19. Malaysia has enforced such an order for the first time in history. This control order is made under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967^{4,5}. Frankly said,

it was difficult for everyone to comply with the MCO at first, but after a few actions taken by the government, everything is slowly recovering. Few experts describe these recalcitrant Malaysians as narcissists who think they are always right. Then, the antisocial types who find it hard to conform to social regulations. Based on the psychological aspect, most of the people acknowledge that it difficult for them to change their habit since it takes time and feels annoyed⁶. There is therefore an urgent need to identify and bridge any gaps in knowledge, attitude and practices among Malaysians. The ultimate goal should be for every Malaysian to be aware of Covid-19 and to respond appropriately if suspected of having Covid-19.

At fifth phase of MCO, which is seeing some Malaysians already feeling anxious and agitated being confined to their daily life with a constant stream of Covid-19 updates. The lock-down causes a major socio-economic disruption thus the ability to forecast the infection dynamic is urgently required to assist the government in timely decisions⁷. This stringent action is not without a cost to society. It has a major social and economic disruptions^{8,9}. The uncertainties related to any outbreak will definitely create anxiety¹⁰. Although the decision to implement MCO was acceptable to many given outbreak casualties, the question is how many weeks is needed? A study showed the suppressive measure too early, then passive outbreak may recur. On the contrary, if the measure was in place for too long, the social, economic, and psychological effect will be massive⁹.

With the MCO extended to June 9, medical experts cautioned that information overload may lead to mental health issues. The ministry's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) said it is common for individuals to feel stressed, worried, and anxious during a crisis like the current Covid-19 pandemic⁷. Everyone reacts or responds differently to stressful situations. How a person responds to the pandemic is influenced by the

individual's background, the differences compared to others, and the community they live in^{2,3}. While some would experience positive psychological impact such as improving social connectedness with family members, others may go through negative psychological impact. Among them are increased stress due to not being able to perform outdoor routine and activities or not being able to see friends^{2,3}.

Since March 28, Malaysia MOH received more than 2,500 calls and over 1,200 WhatsApp messages through tele-counseling and e-counseling services. Regarding his explanation, the three main issues raised by those who contacted the line were to get help, emotional support, and contribution as well as more information on Covid-19. The tele-counseling and e-counseling line through the Covid-19 Psychosocial Support Line with a collaboration of MOH and Mercy Malaysia Volunteers was created to provide emotional support for those who require it during the MCO. As a precaution, the Health Ministry is also advising the public to care for their emotional wellbeing. Anxiety and stress of the Covid-19 issue can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in an individual¹¹. A person could also experience anxiety and panic symptoms due to lack of information or facts, rumours and fake news being spread, or being influenced by social media.

While at home, everyone should always keep ourselves busy and maintain safe communication with our family, friends, and social network through existing social media channel to reduce loneliness and psychosocial isolation¹². If health authorities have recommended limiting everyone's physical social contact during MCO, people still can stay connected via e-mail, social media such as WhatsApp, WeChat, Skype, Messenger, Instagram, video conference, telephone, and others. The MHPSS also advised the public to spend more time physically with their children and family members, for example, listen and talk to them about their likes and hobbies, help them with their tasks, eat together, and for Muslims, to perform prayers together with family members. Find new hobbies which can do indoors with family members for example playing carom, chess, board games. Look into new food recipes and try them out. Apart from that, it is suggested for everyone to learn about positive coping skills. Minimize watching, reading, or listening to news that causes people to feel anxious or distressed, which seek information only from trusted sources, seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice, and mainly take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourselves and family.

Movement Control Act included a comprehensive ban on public movements and gatherings throughout the country including religious, sports, social and cultural activities said by Prime Minister¹³. To enforce this ban, all houses of worship and business premises should be closed except for supermarkets, public markets, convenience stores, and convenience stores selling everyday necessities. Regarding the following the ban order, all schools, government, and private schools including daily schools, boarding schools, international schools, tahfiz centers, and other primary, secondary and pre-university

institutions were closed for the same period. It also involves the closure of all public and private higher education institutions (IPTs) and skills training institutions nationwide. The closure of higher learning institutions and the abrupt shift towards online learning, combined with the admonition to stay put may hit students hard, especially those who are stuck in the university premises.

MCO also included a comprehensive ban on all Malaysians traveling overseas and for those who had just returned from overseas, they were required to undergo a 14 days health check and volunteer quarantine. The entry of all foreign tourists and visitors to the country was also restricted. Besides, all government and private premises were closed except those involved in the country's essential services. It covers water, electricity, energy, telecommunications, postal, transportation, irrigation, oil, gas, fuel, lubricants, broadcasting, finance, banking, health, pharmacy, fire, prisons, ports, airports, security, defense, cleaning, retail, and food supply. Malaysian government also assured that food supplies, daily necessities and health care including mouth and nose cover were adequate³.

This affects the majority of the Malays who celebrate the Aidilfitri. Moreover, visiting and gathering are tradition. People are not allowed to go back to hometown, added roadblocks and enforcement are strict. Expectations of cases have increased but Malaysia managed to contain the local transmission of Covid-19 during the "conditional MCO"

Subsequently, the number of active Covid-19 cases involving locals have dropped. Malaysia saw a spike in cases recently with clusters mostly involving inmates at four immigration detention facilities and foreign labourers. The government ordered them to be tested Covid-19 and placed at quarantine centres, Depot for 14 days. The decision to quarantine and treat all Covid-19 positive cases in hospitals, whether the patients exhibited symptoms or not, as well as making it compulsory for people returning Malaysia from abroad to undergo quarantine are the two key steps behind the country's success in containing the pandemic^{2,3}.

Malaysia's movement control order (MCO) now enter a "recovery phase". Most of social, educational, religious and business activities, as well as economic sectors will reopen in phases, with standard operating procedures to be adhered to.

In conclusion, psychosocial compliance with MCO can be either good or bad for each individual based on their acceptance of Covid-19 since everyone reacts or responds differently to stressful situations. In the meantime, we should give a full commitment following the government's order to flatten the infection rate and end of MCO, so everyone can enjoy their normal life. The public is advised to eat and drink mindfully, reduce stressors, exercise regularly, practice relaxation exercises, talk to someone they trust, only seek information from reliable sources, and keep a personal daily routine. It is urgent for the public to stay calm and follow rules and regulations in place to stay safe. Everyone should care about their mental health during MCO for their good. Stay home, stay safe, and comply with the order.

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