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## Healthy lifestyle campaign most timely

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HEALTH Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng recently launched the Healthy Lifestyle Campaign 2003 at a Putrajaya secondary school to reduce smoking, stress and ill health among upper primary pupils.

The "Be Healthy for Life" campaign aims to drive home four important messages, which are to eat well, have regular physical exercise, say "no" to smoking and be able to handle anger and reduce stress.

According to the Health Minister, the first part of the nine-year Healthy for Life programme targets Standard Four to Six pupils at 280 schools this year. Next year, the programme will focus on workplaces.

The campaign comes at a critical time, in view of the SARS outbreak and other health concerns.

Although Malaysia is not a SARS-affected country, it cannot be complacent.

It has to continue taking stringent measures to avert local transmission of SARS.

While the Health Ministry, with the help of the Immigration Department, can impose and enforce certain requirements on visitors from SARS-affected countries, in the final analysis, it is the Malaysian people who have the most crucial role.

It is essential to stress the importance of hygiene not only in view of SARS, but also to the resurgence of old diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and dengue.

Malaysians must discard habits like littering and dumping waste illegally.

As more and more health issues surface in the years to come in the wake of globalisation and a borderless world, the recent statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the Government would allocate funds for research on deadly diseases like SARS was most appropriate.

This outbreak shows how vital it is for the Government to respond speedily in identifying the virus, its causes and methods of transmission, developing a vaccine and creating measures to contain an epidemic.

We must prepare ourselves to handle new diseases as in the future there will be more of these due to mutation of bacteria and viruses.

In this connection, I welcome the setting up of a new P3-rated research laboratory in Sungai Buloh next year.

This will be the second research facility to be established after the Institute of Medical Research in Kuala Lumpur.

The Health Minister recently explained that the classification P3 indicated the level of biosafety adopted by the facility when conducting research on killer viruses and microbes.

The "Be Healthy for Life" campaign 2003 is vital to make Malaysians fully aware of the importance of living a healthy and fulfilling life. To ensure success, the campaign must reach out to all sections of the population.