

## **Majority of Covid-19 positive tahfiz students show no symptoms: MOH**

**Malaysiakini**

**14 May 2020**

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CORONAVIRUS | Over two-thirds of religious school students who tested positive for Covid-19 had shown no symptoms of having contracted the virus, the Health Ministry revealed today.

Health director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said that to date they have screened and taken samples from a total of 12,384 adults and youths linked to 370 tahfiz schools and madrasah.

"Of all the students, teachers and staff that the MOH has screened so far, 635 of them, or 5.1 percent, had been found positive with the virus.

"And from this, 539 of those positive did not show any symptoms of the virus (prior to the test). This means that 84.9 percent of the cases were asymptomatic," he told a press conference in Putrajaya.

For the record, MOH has been embarking on a targeted testing approach for all madrasah schools nationwide. This is part of the ministry's attempt to trace as many positive cases as possible by testing groups that they deem as high-risk for the virus.

Noor Hisham expressed MOH's concern over the high rate of asymptomatic cases, saying that this increases the risk of those from the group spreading the novel coronavirus to others.

This especially with the Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations approaching which might further heighten the risk of the virus spreading rather quickly as more students return to their hometowns.

To address this, Noor Hisham said the ministry has come up with a series of plans to get all madrasah students tested regardless of their health status.

He wants such students including those who have returned home to contact the nearest district health office, MOH clinic or hospital as soon as possible.

"While for students who have yet to return to their families, we ask that they remain at their schools and contact the district health office or clinic so that samples can be taken for tests."

Noor Hisham also called for all madrasah and tahfiz schools that have yet to be screened by the MOH to come forward and contact the health authority, particularly those schools which are privately run.

According to him, they have so far identified 370 schools nationwide but estimated that there were over 1,000 more in existence.

"We were informed that more than 1,000 private madrasah has yet to come forward for screening.

"So MOH wants to urge the management of all these private schools to contact the district health offices so that we can start conducting screenings (of their students)," he said.

From the 370 schools that have been approached by MOH, they found that 120 of them had links to the Sri Petaling tabligh gathering with some having been visited by tabligh members more than five times.

The Sri Petaling tabligh gathering that was held in late February is the largest Covid-19 infection cluster in Malaysia so far with 2,351 positive cases traced back to the group.

Meanwhile, the ministry has also detected a new cluster of infection among varsity students who had previously been placed under isolation at their respective campuses.

Noor Hisham said the latest cluster involves three Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) students who recently tested positive for the virus albeit having been confined to their campus for more than 14 days.

This brings the total number of students in this cluster to five. Two others are students of the Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI) in Perak.

"So what we are doing now, all the students at the campuses we have put under isolation. We have started contact-tracing and taking swab samples from them.

"Although they have been on campus for more than four weeks, there is a possibility that they were exposed to workers there despite being placed under quarantine," said Noor Hisham.

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Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/525710>