

## **63 under home quarantine due for Covid-19 retest gone off the radar**

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CORONAVIRUS | A total of 63 individuals who were supposed to go for a second Covid-19 test to complete their home quarantine order have gone off the radar, the Health Ministry (MOH) said.

Its director-general, Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah told a press conference today that they would engage the expertise of the police to track down the individuals.

"What MOH did was to cooperate with the police to monitor those who were undergoing quarantine at home.

"This involves the police going to their respective residences to check if they are following the standard operating procedures (SOPs) that had been set for home quarantine.

"So far, 63 cannot be found. And we will track them down using the police's expertise," he said.

Starting June 10, the government has further eased the restrictions under its movement control order (MCO) to implement what they called as the recovery MCO.

The move saw a previous order that required all overseas returnees to undergo mandatory 14-day quarantine at government-designated centres changed to home quarantine.

Under the relaxed quarantine rule, returnees under home quarantine are required to follow a set of guidelines, which include a mandatory second Covid-19 test which they have to do on the 13th day.

However, on June 29, Noor Hisham revealed that a total of 1,472 individuals that were required to do so by then had failed to present themselves for the second test.

On July 11, Inspector-General of Police Abdul Hamid Bador said police managed to trace 532 of the individuals.

## Flouting of rules caused home quarantine reversal

During the press conference, Noor Hisham was asked whether the ministry would consider adopting the use of smart wristbands implemented by several other countries to detect the whereabouts of those placed under quarantine.

He replied the option could be considered by the government, but the wristbands would be costly.

"Right now we are using the MySejahtera application which also can provide us with such information," he added.

Noor Hisham also commented that the government's decision to reverse its home quarantine ruling was due to people flaunting the rules and not following the SOPs.

Beginning this Friday, overseas returnees will be quarantined at government centres.

According to the Health DG, the order would only apply to those who arrive on Friday.

"Those who have been undergoing quarantine at home will continue to do so at home," he said.

Noor Hisham also expressed his disappointment over the lack of responsibility by those who flouted MOH guidelines.

He said infection involving those placed under home quarantine would not have happened if SOPs were followed by the individuals.

"This should not have occurred if they followed the SOPs, practices social distancing at home, or just stayed in their room.

"Because they failed to stay in their room, so the infections have spread.

"And now, we have to look at another way (to handle the problem) which is to have all (returnees) quarantined at government quarantine facilities," Noor Hisham said.

Lackadaisical attitude of the public

Meanwhile, on a new cluster detected at an old folks home in Kluang, Johor, Noor Hisham said MOH is still investigating the source of the infection.

However, he said authorities believed that the infection could have been from a visitor.

This was why visitors to welfare homes, especially those for senior citizens, should be screened for Covid-19, he stressed.

For the record, the cluster has so far spread to 12 residents of the home, including one who has died from the virus. Two other non-residents, including a staff of the welfare home, have also been tested positive.

Noor Hisham was also asked about the rise of new Covid-19 cases involving healthcare professionals in Sarawak and whether that was due to healthcare workers letting their guard down.

To this, he gave a rather general answer on the lackadaisical attitude of the public towards Covid-19 prevention.

"This coronavirus is still within our community. We still haven't ended the virus in our community.

"So, it is important that when we go back, we have to follow all the SOPs.

"The ministry noticed that many among us, when they saw the number of cases is decreasing, they started to take things for granted," he said.

To a question on the government mulling to make wearing face masks in public compulsory, Noor Hisham said that they are still looking into the plan.

He said the concern is on the punishment that members of the public will face if the order is made mandatory.

"Because those who violate the law will be fined, and they can also be jailed.

"So we are looking into the penalties for those who do not wear a face mask," he said.

Noor Hisham added that the ministry encourages the public to wear one when they are in public places.

By wearing a face mask, he added, the wearer can help reduce the risk of the virus spreading by 65 percent while social distance practice can help break the chain of infection between 65 and 70 percent.

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