

Sivagangga cluster may be a superspreader, says Noor Hisham

Malaysiakini

06 August 2020

Hariz Mohd

CORONAVIRUS | The Health Ministry (MOH) fears that the Sivagangga infection cluster that started in Kedah could be linked to a genome of Covid-19 which had been identified as a superspreader in Egypt and Pakistan.

Its director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah told a press conference today that they found the cluster - which MOH has traced back to the owner of a nasi kandar shop in Jitra - had been spreading "very quickly" compared to other infection clusters in the country.

"Now we are looking at the Sivagangga cluster, which is spreading very quickly compared to nine other clusters that we have in the country.

"But now, a study is being carried out to determine if we are facing a cluster called 'Genome 614', a superspreader cluster.

"The ministry was informed that this superspreader originated from Egypt, and also Pakistan.

"There is a high possibility that this cluster (Sivagangga) is a superspreader," he said in Putrajaya.

Noor Hisham was referring to the D614G mutation which global health experts believe presents a more transmissible Covid-19 strain compared to others.

"Super spreader" is a term that refers to Covid-19 strains that have a higher infectivity rate than average. It has also been used to refer to tested-positive patients who spread the virus to a large number of other individuals.

For the record, the Sivagangga cluster was detected late last month when the restaurant owner was tested positive of Covid-19. The man had returned from India on July 13 and was supposed to be under home quarantine but had reportedly failed to adhere to the order.

The Health Ministry reported that the cluster has so far recorded 30 positive cases, including children.

According to Noor Hisham, the ministry was going to culture the Covid-19

sample taken from patients linked to the cluster and study the virus' genomic sequence.

During the conference, Noor Hisham also rebuked the index case patient of the Sivagangga cluster, citing it as an example of how one person could spread coronavirus to many others by not adhering to health guidelines.

He likened the cluster to what happened in Victoria, Australia, where an overseas returnee infected a large number of people in the state.

"Just now, I had a teleconference with my counterpart in Melbourne who informed me that the cases in Victoria were all linked to an overseas returnee who brought the virus back and spread it to others.

"They found this through genomic research which all led them back to this one person.

"So this virus can spread to many just because of one person like what we see in the Sivagangga cluster. Because of one person, the virus infected many," said Noor Hisham.

'Wrong usage of thermometer'

Meanwhile, the director-general also clarified that thermometers should be used according to their usage guide.

Addressing recent viral claims that contactless thermometers were harmful when used on the forehead, he stressed that there was no scientific evidence to prove such side effects.

Using such a thermometer wrongly, such as on other parts of the body, may return inaccurate body temperature results.

"So we do not advise the people to use the equipment on their hands or such. To get an accurate result, (contactless thermometers) must be used on the forehead," said Noor Hisham.

On another matter, Noor Hisham said the ministry was working together with non-governmental organisations and government agencies to provide reusable face masks for school students.

According to him, it may be a viable concept to provide two pieces of reusable masks for school students so that they can use the items interchangeably.

"If we can get enough fabric face masks, maybe this would be the way to

encourage them to use face masks," he said.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/537626>