

## **Benteng, Sungai clusters spur daily new Covid-19 cases to 100**

**Malaysiakini**

**08 September 2020**

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COVID-19 | Malaysia has reported 100 new cases of Covid-19 today, spurred mainly by outbreaks in Kedah and Sabah.

Health Ministry director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said 62 of the new cases are from the Benteng LD cluster in Lahad Datu and Tawau, Sabah, and 23 are from the Sungai cluster in Kedah.

This brings local transmissions to 85 while imported cases account for the other 15 cases.

Imported cases were arrivals from India (11), Indonesia (two), Pakistan (one), and the Philippines (one).

Deaths remain at 128 while 12 new recoveries were reported.

Seven patients are being treated in intensive care units of which four need ventilators.

The top official said 7,130 RT-PCR tests were conducted yesterday, 18 percent of the 38,304 daily maximum capacity.

The Covid-19 reproduction number (Rt), used to indicate the infectivity of the virus, has spiked to 1.72 from 0.72 just two weeks ago.

Benteng is largest active cluster

First detected on Sept 1, the Benteng LD cluster has now grown to 128 cases in two locations and spans three generations.

This makes it the sixth-largest cluster to date and the single largest active cluster.

The Lahad Datu location - a police lockup - registered 37 new cases today, bringing the total to 87 cases. A further 212 are awaiting test results. The area has since been declared a red zone.

The Tawau location - a prison - registered 25 new cases today, bringing the total there to 41 cases with 1,113 test results pending.

Of the 128 cases, most are detainees except for one Tawau prison officer and his one-year-old nephew.

Commenting on the cluster, Noor Hisham shared that the cluster was named after the government's "Ops Benteng" initiative aimed at preventing undocumented migrants from entering the country's borders. The initiative involves officers from the army, police, and other agencies.

The two index cases are undocumented migrants - a 55-year-old Filipino citizen detained at the Lahad Datu police lockup and a 25-year-old Filipino citizen detained at the Tawau prison.

Noor Hisham assured that the ministry had the outbreak under control.

"For now, it is in a police lockup and prisons. The cases are under control and they are not in the community," he said.

15 new cases are healthcare workers

As for the Sungai cluster, the index case is a healthcare worker from a private medical facility in Kedah.

The 23 new cases comprise 15 healthcare workers and seven from the index cases' family - including her siblings, husband, and four children.

The cluster has a total of 26 cases so far.

Noor Hisham used the cluster as an example to illustrate the importance for health frontliners to protect themselves adequately against the virus.

“If we do not follow clinical procedures like using personal protective equipment (PPE) when we see patients, asymptomatic patients who are positive for Covid-19 could infect healthcare workers.

“That’s why we urge those in clinics and hospitals to ensure when patients come to us, we protect ourselves first before we inspect them,” he said.

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Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/541785>