

Health DG: Raw Covid-19 data not shared with S'gor to avoid conflicting interpretations

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COVID-19 | The Health Ministry's (MOH) move to only share processed data and not raw files with state health departments is for better coordination, said director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah today.

This comes after the Selangor Task Force for Covid-19 (STFC) said its efforts to combat the outbreak were hampered because it had not been receiving granular data from the ministry since early October.

Selangor registered 101 new cases as of noon today, the second-highest number nationwide.

Asked about this concern, Noor Hisham explained that the ministry's federal headquarters could not fulfil the STFC's request for "raw data" to ensure data interpretation was standardised.

“If we have not analysed the data and then they make a conclusion, I won’t know what conclusion they make. Is it right for you to make a conclusion when I have not even seen the data yet?”

“That is where we need to standardise the data.

“That means federal will analyse it, and we give the data to the respective states. And the respective states will look into the data,” he said.

He shared that Covid-19 case data was typically channelled from states to the federal ministry to be analysed. The analysed data set was then released to state departments.

The top official added that such centralisation was crucial to prevent conflicting messaging between federal and state health departments.

“So the worst thing that can happen is (if) an announcement has been made using our data, but we don’t know what the announcement is. So I think that (this is about) coordination.

“(It is better) if we can coordinate better between the federal and the state health director; and the state health director coordinates with the state administration,”

he said.

Leave surveillance to ministry

Earlier today, STFC chairperson Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad told Malaysiakini that losing access to granular data and the full list of data variables had hampered its targeted testing efforts.

It had further compromised the task force's community screening, strategic mapping and zone profiling efforts.

Selangor executive councillor for health Dr Siti Mariah Mahmad also shared that the ministry had refused a request to integrate the state government's Selangkah contact tracing app with Putrajaya's similar MySejahtera app.

At his briefing today, Noor Hisham indicated that state governments ought to focus on public awareness efforts and leave public health intervention to the ministry.

"There are things that the state can help us (with) in terms of public empowerment and awareness education and et cetera.

“But we have never empowered the state to take on the role of surveillance (or) to take on the role of public health intervention and et cetera.

“That is our responsibility, we are doing it on our side. So our state health department is doing the contact tracing as well as surveillance in our hospitals.

“So that is where the collaboration on both sides, the state health department and the state administration can be enhanced from time to time,” he said.

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