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Bernama



It's just matter of time before the health authorities in the country decides to raise its level of seriousness in dealing with Influenza A H1N1 from the containment to the mitigation stage as more cases of local transmission are being reported.

However, the question now is how to avoid creating a panic situation when such a decision is taken.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the health authorities are likely to raise the level from containment to the mitigation stage in the next few days once they decide that there is sustained community spread and new cases have no defined epidemiological links with existing ones.

"The situation in Malaysia is still under control although local cases has increased. However, we need to create more awareness but at the same time not to create panic. We need them (people) to be ready for the mitigation process," he told editors and media representatives in a briefing on the H1N1 situation in the country here today.

Liow said at the moment, the health authorities were still able to trace down the contacts of people afflicted although the number was getting bigger but stressed that more awareness campaigns were needed to raise the awareness level and to keep the situation under control.

Liow : Get ready, we may go into mitigation stage

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"Therefore, we will continue to stress on the importance of personal hygiene. This includes washing your hands and wearing a mask if you have flu, sneezing and coughs," he said.

Liow also praised the media for their transparent and responsible reporting on Influenza H1N1, also known as swine flu, since the first case was detected in the country on May 15, which helped to create a certain level of awareness among the population.

"It's very responsible reporting, giving full coverage and more importantly, reporting the information in a very responsible manner. They (media) do not just pluck information from the sky. On top of that, they also reported in a transparent manner beside providing various additional information," he said.

He said as Malaysia prepared to enter the mitigation stage on H1N1, the public needed to be told more on the "dos and don'ts" and the need to balance "the business as usual and containment measures".

"We will let the people know the gravity of the situation without creating panic," he said, as he explained that the health authorities were bracing for more cases as the H1N1 pandemic is likely to last nearly a year.

The only positive point about H1N1 is that the fatality rate is low in this region even though 281 deaths have been reported.

Health Director-General Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican explained that though the H1N1 fatality rate was only 0.2 percent, but due to its uniqueness, it could spread very fast as its spread was from human to human.

"We are worried about the impact on those having complications such as lung problems. The virus can spread within one metre between a carrier and another person. So, the only way is that, if you are having flu, sneezing and cough, please wear masks. This can prevent further spread while the carrier seeks treatment as soon as possible," he said.

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In terms of treatment, he said those infected would be treated free of charge, even if it involved foreigners and the cost per treatment was RM55 at any of the 28 government hospitals designated to handle the outbreak.

Although the vaccine for H1N1 would only be available by August this year, it was a curable disease and the government had a stockpile of two million Tamiflu shots for treatment of those infected by the virus, he added.

According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) information, Influenza A H1N1 had spread to 126 countries with 91,457 cases and 387 deaths reported as of 8am today.

On top of that, 38 countries have reported local transmissions and 11 with substantial human-to-human transmission cases.

Source: http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Monday/Frontpage/20090706190737/Article/index.html