

THE STRAITS TIMES

Malaysia on high alert over mpox; Indonesia advises sick travellers to discontinue visit



Malaysian authorities are stepping up surveillance at international entry points. PHOTO: REUTERS

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PETALING JAYA - Although no new mpox cases have been reported in Malaysia in 2024, the Health Ministry said it is ramping up surveillance and advocacy activities after the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued its highest alert.

The Malaysian authorities are stepping up surveillance at international entry points, and all travellers from countries that have reported mpox cases are required to monitor their health for 21 days after their arrival in Malaysia.

The ministry advises people with a history of risky activities or who have symptoms such as rashes and blisters to immediately seek treatment at the nearest health facility and avoid contact with other people to prevent the spread of the virus.

Healthcare personnel at public and private facilities are required to notify their nearest district health office of suspected and confirmed cases, to ensure that prevention and control measures can be implemented.

The ministry assured the public that there are enough labs for testing and diagnostics.

There are 10 labs, including two private labs, with the capability to conduct PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests to confirm diagnosis.

The ministry is also increasing awareness by distributing materials to high-risk groups and at high-risk locations, such as spas and saunas.

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It said premises offering services that involve skin-to-skin contact with customers must always ensure that hygiene is maintained and their employees as well as customers are not experiencing symptoms such as blisters or rashes.

“If an employee or customer experiences symptoms, they should immediately seek medical attention,” the ministry said in a statement on Aug 18.

It added that it will continue to work with other government agencies and non-government agencies, including public and private hospitals, to monitor, detect and treat mpox cases.

It will also continue to monitor the situation within and outside the country.

Separately, in Indonesia, its Health Ministry's acting director-general of disease prevention and control, Mr Yudhi Pramono, said on Aug 18 that foreign visitors are required to declare their medical records and recent travel history by filling in forms at entry gates.

“Visitors with illnesses are advised not to continue their trip (in Indonesia),” he was quoted as saying by Jakarta Globe.

WHO declared mpox, previously known as monkeypox, a global public health emergency for the second time on Aug 14.

The first public health emergency of international concern, or PHEIC, was declared on July 23, 2022, and ended on May 11, 2023.

WHO said the second declaration was made based on the advice of the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee, given the new mpox strain known as clade 1b, which is spreading fast in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring African countries.

“The increase in cases in Congo is quite significant, with 15,600 cases and 537 deaths reported in 2024, which is higher than the year prior.

“Apart from that, four countries in East Africa, namely Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, reported mpox cases for the first time,” it added.

Malaysia has recorded nine mpox cases to date since the first case was detected on July 26, 2023, including one recorded in November.

The Health Ministry said all the cases reported had a history of high-risk activities and had recovered, with no deaths reported.

Commenting on the latest development, Professor Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh, a health economics and public health specialist with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia’s Faculty of Medicine, said those who had sexual encounters with partners from countries where there are mpox cases, including places where the disease is endemic, should be monitored.

WHO declares mpox a global public health emergency



“It can also spread from infected pregnant women to their unborn children.

“Those travelling out to infected countries, especially the United States and African countries, need to be mindful of the risk of contact and infection during sexual activities,” she said. THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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