



## ***THE MALAYSIAN THORACIC SOCIETY***

### **PRESS STATEMENT**

**11 May 2020**

#### **WEARING FACEMASKS IN PUBLIC IS KEY TO HELP CONTROL COVID-19 DURING EXTENDED CMCO**

As Malaysia eases into an extended phase of conditional movement control order (CMCO) beginning on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020 until 9th June 2020, we shall witness the gradual return of new normal activities among fellow Malaysians in many non-essential sectors in the country. This period also includes several major religious and cultural festivals such as Hari Raya, Hari Keamatan and Hari Gawai which will inevitably bring increased social interaction between family members and also within the community.

In educating the public as they gradually enter into the new normal, it is imperative that any advice given by the government to all Malaysians is guided by the best scientific evidence because this will help control COVID-19 infection, thus preventing a surge whilst instilling confidence among the general public. We wish to state that wearing a facemask in public is key in helping control infection by COVID-19.

#### **How does wearing a facemask in public help?**

Scientific evidence points to the use of facemasks in primarily helping to control the source of infection. This is a key public health initiative as a sizeable number of COVID -19 infections occur in the asymptomatic phase. It has also been shown to be as equally beneficial as the practice of frequent handwashing as a mitigation strategy.

The impact of this practice is further enhanced by mass public masking, a phenomenon called 'prevention paradox' where small personal benefits accrue a greater public good when wearing facemasks in public is widespread.

Furthermore, this practice is cheap and simple, and the advice can be easily emphasised to the general public for the greatest benefits.

#### **What type of mask?**

The medical-grade masks used by healthcare workers are designed for use in hospitals or clinics dealing with patients with suspected or confirmed COVID -19 infection and therefore they should remain accessible to healthcare workers.

The general public should use any mask, either self-made, or purchased from general shops and pharmacies, as they are adequate for the purpose of source control as long as they are properly used.

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**Facemasks in public are part and parcel of a comprehensive CMCO strategy.**

The notion that wearing a facemask lulls the individual into a false sense of security is unfounded, but the public must constantly be reminded that other measures such as physical distancing and handwashing are crucial to control resurgence of new COVID-19 cases. It should be considered as part and parcel of a comprehensive strategy of CMCO.

Evidence from other countries that have implemented this strategy as part of a comprehensive easing approach should appease all of us that this is the right way forward.

The Malaysian Thoracic Society therefore wishes to emphasise to policy-makers and the public alike that wearing facemasks in public is key in helping control COVID-19 infection.

We the undersigned,

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*The Malaysian Thoracic Society is a professional medical body that represents the respiratory medical fraternity with the objective of advancing knowledge and practice of respiratory medicine in Malaysia.*

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