



# *THE MALAYSIAN THORACIC SOCIETY*

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

29 July 2020

### **MANDATORY USE OF FACE MASKS IN PUBLIC**

The Malaysian Thoracic Society reiterates its support for the Government's move to mandate the wearing of face masks in public spaces from August 1st 2020. There is robust scientific evidence to back up the use of face masks in reducing SARS CoV-2 transmissions by asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic infected individuals.

This mandatory ruling is in line with similar initiatives across the globe. It is in keeping with advice by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

#### **Clear Definition and Consistent Implementation**

We urge the Government to be clear and consistent on the definition of public spaces where the wearing of face masks is mandatory. Exclusions - such as for those with breathing problems or small children – must be made explicit.

The use of face masks in public transport and crowded public spaces, e.g. markets or shopping malls, is necessary. However, its exemption in overcrowded schools requires refinement and regular review for emerging evidence and changing prevalence of COVID-19 in the community. Although voluntary, teachers and students should always wear masks when social distancing is not possible, and this must be practised together with other hygiene measures at all schools.

#### **Free Masks to B40 Group**

We hope that the Government is sensitive to the cost element for the struggling B40 population, especially given the current economic climate. A face mask could be a simple WHO specification-compliant home-made cloth mask or a commercial 3-ply mask. Irrespective of the type, the mask must be replaced or washed if reusable. This is an added financial burden to the B40 as a family in this population typically consists of a few individuals who will all require face masks. Therefore, suitable face masks should be made freely available to the B40.

#### **Continuous Public Education is Crucial**

We encourage the Government to continuously stress to the general public that the use of face masks in public spaces is only one part of an overall strategy that includes hand washing, social distancing and sanitising places of frequent use. Therefore, there must be a continuation of the initiatives to educate members of the public on these 'new norms'. Simple infographics in multiple languages are particularly helpful and can be done in

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tandem with professional/non-profit organisations. There is ample evidence to show that a knowledgeable public increases community adherence to health policy advice.

Staying vigilant together as one will ensure Malaysia always remains on top of COVID-19.

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Assoc Prof Dr Pang Yong Kek

*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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