

Joint Press Statement by Senior Citizens' Non-Governmental Organizations and Affiliated Medical Societies on the Plight of Older Malaysians during the CoVID-19 Pandemic

Calling All Older Malaysian- the Nation Needs You to Help Fight CoVID-19!

These are anxious times, particularly for our older population and their family members. For many of our seniors, this may evoke flashbacks of May 13th 1969, and for those who are in the oldest age group this may even be a reminder of the communist occupation and the second world war. We are at war with a virus which spares the young and targets those who are older, particular those over 80 years, as well as those with other illnesses- heart disease, diabetes, lung problems, high blood pressure and cancer.

On Monday, our Prime Minister announced a movement control order, which came into force on this Wednesday. The aim of this movement restriction order is to ensure that we practice social distancing. This means that we should stay away from other human beings to avoid infecting each other. The Severe Adult Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 or SARS-CoV-2 is a virus that jumped species, originating from the seafood market in Wuhan, China. This virus is therefore not previously known to mankind. This means that we have no immunity, no vaccination and no cure for this virus. The safest way to deal with the virus is therefore to avoid getting it in the first place. Which is why need to practice social distancing.

The advice for social distancing is to stay at least 1 metre, but preferably 2 metres, apart from another human being, and to limit your movements. You should also practice good personal hygiene. Wash your hands often, and make sure you wash it well for at least 20 seconds. If there is no soap and water available, use hand sanitizers. Avoid touching your face, and practice what we call cough etiquette. Cough etiquette means if you need to cough, cover your mouth with a tissue, throw the tissue away and wash your hands well. You should always do this from now on. Even after the control order is lifted.

The movement control order issued by the government limits our movement. It is difficult to imagine not going out for two weeks, but that is what we really have to do- stay at home! You should do so not because you are afraid of being fined or jailed by the government, which will happen if you do not comply, but because we care for our nation and we care for each other. We cannot afford for more people to fall ill, because our hospitals cannot cope, and while most younger people will only have a mild illness and get better, we will lose many of our older citizens prematurely if they do fall ill.

Of course, you cannot avoid going out to get food and your medications, and those services will stay open for you. If you do go out to stock up, please only buy what you need for a few days, especially perishable items. If you hoard, that means there may not be enough for other people, and they will have to go without. Please do be a responsible citizen at this rather difficult time. When you go out, please do not enter the supermarket or market if it is crowded. You still have to practice social distancing. Some supermarkets are extending their opening hours and allowing only senior citizens and disabled people to go in earlier in the morning before opening to the rest of us. Do find out from your local stores about opening hours.

Many of you of course will be worried about hospital appointments and medications. At the moment, while the movement control order is on, you should postpone your appointment unless you cannot wait and must see the doctor straight away. If your medications are running out, you should be able to go to the pharmacy directly to get your supply of medications until your next of appointment. The clinic counters will be open for urgent cases, but if you have to go there, just get your new appointment and prescription and leave straight away. Alternatively, our Ministry of Health hospitals can also organize for your medications to be posted to you. You just need to call your clinic. Our private pharmacies are also allowed to stay open, and you should be able to get your medications from any pharmacy near you. Do not stock up on medications, and this will reduce the supply for others.

What if it is not so easy for you to get around and you need help with your groceries and food? Don't worry, there are people out there who are looking for people like you to help. Please do let someone know by calling them or sending them a social media message that you need help. Don't be shy. They may be able to help you out themselves or they may know people in your area who are offering this service. There are lots of social media messages flying around advertising these services, someone is bound to have seen something useful.

Many older adults will feel empty and lost as they have been heavily reliant on their social contacts and their strict routines. Giving up their regular morning exercise groups in the park or their weekend family gatherings is really hard. Please do not be tempted to meet and hope you do not get caught. It is not the point. This enemy is a virus, it's us against the virus! We are all on the same side, and we won't win unless we work together. Instead, think of other ways you can stay in touch and even better, think of ways you can help others. Pick up the phone, call someone you have not spoken to for a long time, find out how they are. Go to your garden and tend to your grass and plants- do things you did not necessary have time for before. Use social media- WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype, Hangouts to keep in touch. You can now do group sessions with those. They are really easy to use, so don't be afraid to try. You can still do group Taichi, choir singing, cooking lessons, and lots more.

Getting shut in the same home for some time may cause tempers to fray between family members. Try to count your blessings and do special little things for each other instead. Offer to make each other a drink but wash your hands for at least 20 seconds first. Say things that encourage each other and be grateful for what you have. Use this time to relive happy memories. Bring out those family wedding photos and start telling your children and grandchildren moments of history, but don't forget to sit at least 1 metre apart, or that is 3 feet in old money. You would not had had time to if it was not for the movement control order.

No matter what age you are, we all have a responsibility towards our nation and our fellow citizens. The nation needs all of you to help yourself by staying healthy and help others by not becoming a vehicle of transmission. Stay safe, all you senior citizens out there, and stay healthy.

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