

7 January 2021

**Open Letter to the Prime Minister of Malaysia
YAB Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin**

YAB Tan Sri,

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

We the undersigned view with much apprehension and concern the current status of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Our national metrics paint a very bleak picture of COVID-19 pandemic management.

Despite MCOs and other health interventions, the daily reported cases are not decreasing.

The Cumulative Incidence Density (per 100,000 population) and the Infection Rate (active cases per 1,000 population) is not flattening, with the latest national Infection Rate registered at 0.879 per 1,000 population, meaning between 8-9 persons are actively infected for every 10,000 people.

The testing positive rate (rolling 7-day average) is rising, registering 8.9% on 3 Jan 2021, well above the WHO's 5.0% benchmark of effective pandemic control and containment.

Kindly allow us to propose 10 urgent and critical actions lest Malaysia slips into COVID-19 Intensive Care.

1. To ramp up testing with triaged, mass and frequent testing regimen, utilizing inexpensive rapid testing kits (RTK-Ag), instead of PCR, to help to slow the transmission of COVID-19.
2. Early RTK-Ag diagnosis of cases within 24 hours would enable rapid isolation of cases and facilitate prompt contact tracing.
3. Automating contact tracing with digital apps would hasten the tracking process while leveraging on data science and machine learning can identify the hotspots in the nation for targeted screening. Only this Find-Test-Trace-Isolate (FTTI) rapid response will bust the COVID-19 clusters and mitigate the sporadic spread of the coronavirus.
4. In anticipation of the increasing COVID-19 cases and to protect the healthcare capacity, we advocate that clinical stage 1 and 2 cases be isolated at home with clear guidelines from the MOH. Their wellbeing can be tracked daily with digital apps, supported by empowering the local community and urgent transfers to COVID-19 hospitals organized for cases that deteriorate.
5. We must protect the excellent work of our medical professionals in the COVID-19 hospitals by decanting all non-COVID-19 cases to non-COVID-19 government and private hospitals. This will allow them to focus on the sickest cases and not be distracted by asymptomatic and mild COVID cases, thus ensuring the best outcomes.
6. Support industries, the engine of our economic growth with creative measures to mitigate the 3Cs. The POIS initiative (Preventing and early detection of Outbreaks at Ignition Sites) is a tripartite

government, private sector and NGO partnership which emphasizes early detection testing regime, enhances public health measures and health education of industry and migrant workers. This POIS initiative developed in consultation with industry and WHO can be replicated elsewhere as a public health operational tool, truly embracing a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

7. Similar initiatives must be developed for the other hotspots of COVID-19 outbreaks, namely the prison and detention centres.
8. Expedite the regulatory processes so that immunization can begin as soon as the first doses of vaccines arrive at the airport. Debunking COVID-19 and vaccine disinformation would empower our rakyat with informed consent when the COVID-19 vaccines arrive. Apart from prioritizing the high-risk groups, seriously consider vaccinating migrant workers to protect our industries and the refugee community who are silent epicentres of COVID-19 outbreaks. The cost of the vaccines must be capped at less than RM100 per dose for those getting their shots privately and by extension the rapid test kits must be capped at less than RM100 per test to ensure more affordable and wider coverage and uptake of both vaccines and rapid testing.
9. A COVID-19 Task Force comprising a cross-sectoral and empowered team of subject matter experts must be immediately formed to provide evidence-based advice on a harmonized whole-of-government response across ministries and agencies. The COVID-19 Task Force will help steer

the nation out of this pandemic by regularly presenting its recommendations and audit of the health economic impact of key decisions to the Cabinet. To ensure independence of the COVID-19 Task Force, the Malaysian Medical Association, Academy of Medicine Malaysia, Malaysian Public Health Physicians' Association and Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia are best positioned to select the members.

10. Do not politicize the pandemic but instead secure a bipartisan consensus and approach to flatten the pandemic curve, accelerate efforts to achieve herd immunity as a form of community protection to co-exist with the coronavirus. GE15 in the midst of an uncontained pandemic is an unmitigated disaster waiting to happen as PRN Sabah has exemplified.

This is the back-to-basics public health management of a pandemic which we trust YAB Tan Sri will consider urgently and seriously to mitigate the devastating consequences of the pandemic, protect the lives and livelihoods of our rakyat and to reset our economic recovery.

This Open Letter is endorsed by the following individuals, in alphabetical order:

1. Tan Sri Dr Abu Bakar Suleiman (Former Director-General of Health)
2. Prof Dr Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman (Secretary General, Federation of Islamic Medical Associations)

3. Prof Datuk Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman (Professor of Medicine, Universiti Malaya)
4. Prof Dr Ahmad Hata Rasit (Deputy Vice Chancellor and Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak)
5. Dr Ahmad Munawar Helmi bin Salim (Immediate Past Chairman, Islamic Medical Association Response & Relief Team)
6. Dr Azhar Abdul Aziz (Consultant Emergency Physician)
7. Dato' Dr Amar-Singh HSS (Consultant Paediatrician)
8. Prof Dato' Dr Azizi Haji Omar (Past President Malaysian Paediatric Association)
9. Datuk Dr Christopher Lee (Former Deputy Director-General of Health (Research & Technical Support))
10. Dr Dhesi Baha Raja (Consultant Public Health Physician & Chief Medical & Innovation Officer of Ainqa Health)
11. Dr Gunasegaran PT Rajan (Past President, Obstetrical & Gynaecological Society of Malaysia)
12. Dr Hung Liang Choo (President, Malaysian Paediatric Association)
13. Dato' Dr Jahizah Hassan (President, College of Anaesthesiologists)
14. Dr Jeffrey Abu Hassan (Immediate Past President, Islamic Medical Association Malaysia)
15. Dr Johari Bux (Past President, Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Malaysia)
16. Emeritus Prof Jomo Kwame Sundaram (Former United Nations Assistant Secretary General)

17. Dr Khor Swee Kheng (Independent Consultant, Health Systems and Policies, Consultant in Health Policies, and Malaysian Health Coalition)
18. Datuk Dr Kuljit (President, Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia)
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35. Puan Shariah Asiah (President, Malaysian Nursing Association)
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37. Dr Steven Chow (President, Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Association Malaysia)
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40. Dr Teoh Siang Chin (Past President, Malaysian Medical Association, Former Melaka State Health Director)
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44. Dato' Dr Zainal Ariffin bin Omar (President, The Malaysian Public Health Physicians' Association)
45. Dato' Dr Zainudin bi Md Zin (Chairman Lung Foundation of Malaysia, Past President of College of Physicians Malaysia)
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