

TARIKH	AHAD, 16 JANUARI 2022
AKHBAR	THE STAR
TAJUK ARTIKEL	MALAYSIAN-MADE COVID-19 VACCINES TO COVER NEW VARIANTS
M/S	11
BIDANG	MEDICINE
KATA KUNCI	TECHNOLOGY UTILIZATION



Clinical trials will also prove if the proposed vaccines are safe to be mixed and given to recipients of shots from Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Sinovac or other types of vaccines.

there is evidence of Covid-19 aerosol transmission (spread through tiny particles suspended in the air).

This is in addition to droplet transmission (spread through droplets containing the virus that comes in contact with another person's eyes, nose or mouth).

"As such, everybody needs to ensure they wear suitable masks that fits their faces," Dr Tahir advises.

Nevertheless, while the virus is easily transmissible, it is also easily inactivated or destroyed, especially on surfaces.

"Covid-19 is an enveloped RNA virus. Such viruses are easily inactivated by soap or other anti-septic material.

"Sanitisation is one way to kill the virus. That's why people should wash their hands using soap. Sanitising surfaces will also help curb possible spread," he reiterates.

There is no risk of transmission when swimming.

"Usually, the water in swimming pools is treated using simple disinfectant and that is also good enough to deactivate the virus," Dr Tahir says.

In the outdoors, Covid-19 can't survive long on surfaces outside due to many factors, including the fact that it needs host cells to survive.

"Covid-19 can be inactivated when exposed to sunlight (ultraviolet or UV light). The process of drying will also inactivate the virus.

"UV light is one method of environmental sanitisation. We use UV light to sanitize our lab at the end of the day," he shares.

Good ventilation is also encouraged at home and public places like schools.

"Air-conditioning with fresh air circulation will also help to create better ventilation," he says.

Different from the original

While we know more about

"It's very important to have the local capacity to develop vaccines as vaccination is key to stop any pandemic."

Dr Tahir



Covid-19 now, the IMR says many things are still unconfirmed about Omicron.

The coronavirus has opportunities to undergo mutation, especially during the process of multiplication.

"This happens either in oneself or when transmission occurs in the community.

"Based on whole genome sequencing that is being carried out since Feb 2020, we see that there is so much diversity in the virus as a result of the mutations," Dr Tahir says.

The current circulation of the coronavirus has diversified so much from the original Wuhan Ancestral variant, which started spreading in late Oct 2019.

The mutations have led to VOCs, namely Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Omicron.

"VOCs have public health implications with higher transmissibility and severity, coupled with lower efficacy to vaccines or treatment regimens," Dr Tahir explains.

IMR detected the first case of Omicron in Malaysia on Dec 2, 2021 by screening travellers entering through KLIA.

"Until now there are many things that we are unsure about this new variant.

"But based on World Health Organisation guidelines, there is increased transmission of the virus," Dr Tahir says.

The higher mutations in the spike gene make it easier for the virus to bind to human cells in the respiratory tract.

This also causes the presence of a higher viral load in the nose, thus enhancing transmission to others due to respiratory droplets.

"We are not sure whether the Omicron variant increases the severity of the disease.

"Data from South Africa (where first cases of Omicron were reported) shows no significant increase in ICU admissions or deaths.

However, this data is still preliminary and we need to evaluate data from other countries as well," Dr Tahir adds.

Overall, the pandemic has taught valuable lessons.

"This includes the local ability to develop testing reagents, as well having local manufacturers of reagents and other things which we need like PPE and so on.

"It's also very important to have the local capacity to develop vaccines as vaccination is key to stop any pandemic.

"With the local capacity to develop vaccines, then there is better acceptance of vaccines," he says.

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