

Friday, 31st July - Health Ministry Director-General Dr Mohd Ismail Merican today said that the ministry was doing its level best to raise awareness on the A(H1N1) outbreak so that it could be contained, and more importantly safe lives.

"We feel that we are doing whatever we can... I think everybody by now know about A(H1N1) but whether they are applying the advice of Health Ministry is another matter.

"This is because people are still take things very lightly but now (since) everyday we are reporting one death (at least), so maybe now, they will take notice," he told reporters after a function at Marriot Hotel in Putrajaya.

The number of A(H1N1) cases in the country has surpassed 1,000, with four deaths so far.

Ismail said that initially the ministry was accused of "overreacting" and "overdoing" its warnings and precautions over the outbreak.

However now the perception has changed, he said, adding that people were aware as to why the ministry was overcautious.

"In Asia, we are a little bit more proactive, that is why we are doing more (than we should). But then we cannot prevent the inevitable," he said.

He said that it was not the role of the ministry alone to prevent the outbreak from spreading.

He said members of the public too should do their part and pointed out that the ministry was helpless in situations where infected people or those suspected to have the flu have violated their home quarantine by going to the cinemas and eating out.

"Now who is going to prevent them? I make a plea to all Malaysians to take care of themselves.

"You never know when you are going to end up with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS - serious reaction to various forms of injuries to the lung)," Ismail said.

Doctors could have been more alert

On another matter, Ismail also said that doctors were also not to be blamed entirely for the fatal cases of the flu in this country.

He said that the four death cases happened because "the problems do not only lie on the hospitals and the doctors but on the patients themselves".

"I am not blaming anyone, but the fourth case, the patient came very late for treatment. The symptoms started on July 16 and the parents have been asking her to go to hospital.

"But the patient did not want to go but finally came on July 26 and died two days later. By then her lungs were already full with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), so there is nothing we can do," he said.

The fourth victim, a 20-year-old woman, died from Influenza A(H1N1) in Hospital Malacca two days ago.

Ismail added that it was the same case for the three other cases, in which two of the victims were also obese.

"If you are obese, the risk of getting complications is so much higher. If you have co-morbid conditions like diabetic and chronic respiratory diseases, come to hospital early and don't wait," he said.

He however admitted that some doctors were also to be blamed for failing to diagnose the flu.

"This is the case with the second and third (death) cases, the patients went to see several doctors and they kept going from one doctor to another. This showed the patients were obviously asking for help.

"But the doctors keep shifting them all over the place and finally they end up in hospital. Even then, the diagnosis is already late because of poor sense of alert," he said.