

PUBLIC HEALTH

SMOKING BAN AT LAUNDRETTES, HOTELS NEXT

Health Ministry has received requests to expand ban, says minister

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THE Health Ministry will ban smoking in laundrettes and hotels in the near future.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said currently, only nine types of premises, in-

cluding eateries, had been gazetted as no-smoking zones.

He said the ministry received requests to expand the smoking ban to laundrettes and hotels, where many smokers light up.

"Checks showed that there are still those who smoke there (laundrettes and hotels).

"There is worry that this could cause health problems for passive smokers.

"Therefore, we will discuss the possibility of increasing (the number of no-smoking zones)," he said after visiting smoke-free eateries here yesterday.

Earlier, Dr Dzulkefly and a team of health and environment officers conducted checks at eater-



Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (centre) handing out a pamphlet on the smoking ban to patrons during a visit to an eatery in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY MOHAMAD SHAHRIL BADRI SAALI

ies in Bandar Permaisuri, Cheras, here.

Ministry vans equipped with loudspeakers blared messages urging members of the public to adhere to the smoking ban.

This is part of the ministry's efforts to raise awareness of the smoking ban, which came into force yesterday.

Those caught smoking in prohibited areas will be fined up to RM10,000 or face two years' jail.

Eateries found to have allowed customers to light up will be slapped with a maximum fine of RM2,500. Smokers are allowed to light up 3m away from the establishments.

Dr Dzulkefly said fines and compounds would only be imposed six months after the enforcement of the ban.

"We want people to understand that the ministry does not want to punish (smokers). Instead, we want to educate them so that the smoking ban is effective.

"Verbal warnings will be issued to smokers, but punitive action will be enforced after the six-month grace period. There is no reason why they can't follow the rules by then."

He said 5,008 health and environment officers had been tasked with monitoring and issuing verbal warnings to smokers

and food operators who violate the ban.

On a related issue, Dr Dzulkefly said he did not rule out the possibility of banning electronic cigarettes, vape or shisha in gazetted premises.

Although some claim that the fluid used in the devices did not have nicotine, he said the ministry had a mechanism to determine whether this was true through sampling in the laboratory.

"It is not difficult to determine this and take action through standard operating procedures so that we have evidence to support the prosecution."

'We will see Smokers Right Club in court'

KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry is ready to fight a legal challenge brought by the Smokers Right Club against the new no-smoking ruling at eateries to safeguard public health.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said the gazetted prohibition against smoking in eateries was based on firm grounds under the Control of Tobacco Product (Amendment) Regulations 2008.

However, he said, the legal challenge by the seven members of the club was part and parcel of a democratic country, which allowed citizens to express disagreement with the government.

"This is a democratic country. (The seven smokers) have the right to express their disagreement with (the Health Ministry).



A no-smoking sign at an eatery in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY MOHAMAD SHAHRIL BADRI SAALI

They are free to do so.

"I have gone through the judicial review of the seven individuals and their lawyer, Mohamed Haniff Khatri Abdulla.

"We are more than willing to see them in court. We know we are on firm ground, and we have the provisions under the Control of Tobacco Product (Amendment) Regulations.

"We will see them in court to ensure we can successfully carry out the programme to safeguard the health of Malaysians, like young children and the elderly who cannot defend themselves (against passive smoke from cigarettes) in public places."

He was speaking on the sidelines of a press conference in Ban-

dar Permaisuri, Cheras, here, yesterday, on the first day of the smoking ban at eateries.

On Monday, members of the Smokers Right Club filed an application at the High Court for leave to initiate a judicial review against the ministry.

The seven — Mohd Hanizam Yunus, 52, Zulkifli Mohamad, 56, Mohd Laisani Dollah, 46, Mohd Sufian Awaludin, 35, Ridzuan Muhammad Noor, 52, Mohd Yazid Mohd Yunus, 48, and Yuri Azhar Abdollah, 39 — claimed that the smoking ban contradicts the Federal Constitution.

They said smoking was not a criminal activity and not banned, so the right to engage in it was guaranteed by the Constitution.

80pc of Netizens polled want ban to be expanded

KUALA LUMPUR: About 80 per cent of more than 25,000 Netizens who participated in an online survey by the New Straits Times Press Bhd's publications agreed with the proposal that hotels and laundrettes be included in the smoke-free zone list.

The survey was carried out on Facebook and Twitter yesterday following a report quoting Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad as saying that the ministry was looking into expanding the smoking ban.

A total of 22,898 Netizens cast their votes between 1pm and 6pm through the Facebook pages of *Berita Harian*, *Harian Metro* and *New Straits Times*, with more than 80 per cent, or 18,235 Netizens, in favour of the proposal.

The same survey on the publications' Twitter pages garnered 3,019 votes, with 85 per cent, or 2,572 Netizens, in favour.

Netizen Nor Azlina said smokers should only light up at home

to not affect the health of others.

Nabawi Sabri said the gazetted smoking ban was a motivation for smokers to kick the habit.

"To hardcore smokers, make this a new year's resolution and motivation to quit smoking. Good luck," he said.

In a more stern tone, Netizen Ruzaiman Wakaf Bharu suggested that cigarettes be banned, while Arif Akashah reminded Muslims that smoking was forbidden in Islam.

Hasanul Isyraf Abdul Aziz said pictures of errant smokers should be made viral by the ministry.

"Report and make the faces of the smokers viral through SMS WhatsApp or Telegram," he said.

Nora Zura proposed that public markets be made a smoke-free zone too.

"If possible, (gazette) fish/public markets (as smoke-free areas) as they are also enclosed areas.

"There are customers and traders who smoke in public markets," he said.