

EDITORIAL

Influenza!! A hidden Burden of Disease in Malaysia

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Influenza, a contagious respiratory illness presented with sudden onset of fever, sore throat, cough – usually unproductive, runny nose, headache, aching muscles and severe malaise, caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Yearly, influenza infection leads to an estimated 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness and 250,000 – 500,000 deaths¹. In children under 5 years, an estimated 28,000 – 111,500 deaths accountable to influenza occur annually, with 99% of the number occur in developing countries². Information on childhood influenza is scarce in Malaysia.

Vaccination is the most potent measure to inhibit influenza infection and its complications³. In Malaysia, the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 has increased consciousness of the general people and medical personnel about influenza⁴. Most of the information were obtained from Kuala Lumpur with no information obtained from Sabah. In 2009, Seroprevalence rate of seasonal H1N1 was 14.7% and of H3N2 was 21%. Among the Malaysian population, influenza A Infection was common⁵.

The available data is not enough to draw a complete picture of the predominant circulating strain of the influenza virus in Malaysia at any one time. In 2018, a preliminary study was conducted using ProLact Flu One kits to investigate the prevalence of influenza among the students of Universiti Malaysia

Sabah. The study revealed that prevalence of influenza was 8.1%. The prevalence for both Influenza A and Influenza B was equal (4.05%) which is a unique finding of this study compared to other studies, where influenza A was more common occurring strain than influenza B⁶. This finding identifies that the present scenario of influenza prevalence is varying with the previous. It is perceptible that influenza causes a pronounced and under recognized burden of disease in Malaysia.

The void in knowledge of the burden of influenza in Malaysia is diverse. Timely and adequate efforts are essential to fill these gaps. Vaccines and antivirals are potent interventions that can be adopted to reduce the burden.

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