

# Uni-ted: Varsities back call to bar red zone students

By Audrey Dermawan and Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan - September 30, 2020 @ 10:00am (NST)



Local varsities are backing the Higher Education Ministry's proposal to postpone the registration of new students, as well as the return of current students from red zones to campuses. - NSTP file pic

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Local varsities are backing the Higher Education Ministry's proposal to postpone the registration of new students, as well as the return of current students from red zones to campuses.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Taufiq Yap Yun Hin said the university agreed to heed the ministry's call to prevent the emergence of new Covid-19 clusters in its campuses.

"Sabah is not conducive for students at the moment. Although all our three campuses in Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Labuan are not under the Targeted Enhanced Movement Control Order (Temco), we prefer to err on the side of caution," he told the New Straits Times.

Dr Taufiq said the previous round of MCO took a toll on students' mental health and the university was not prepared to put them through the ordeal again if the pandemic were to worsen in Sabah.

"Some of our students faced depression and emotional stress because they were separated from their families and confined in their rooms during the MCO.

"We had to get counsellors and psychologists to help them cope with their emotional setbacks."

On Monday, UMS barred students from entering its campuses until further notice and announced that students' registration, orientation week and teaching and learning activities would be conducted online.

However, Dr Taufiq said, UMS would make exceptions to accommodate students' needs on a case-by-case basis.

"If they have arrived in Kota Kinabalu prior to the ministry's notice or face Internet connectivity issues at home, we can make the necessary arrangements for them.

"They can always reach out to us through our hotline numbers at 088-320 054 or 088-320 060."

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) has also barred students from Sabah and other Covid-19 red zone states due to the limited quarantine accommodation in its campus.

Students have been told to follow classes online instead.

New students, with the exception of those from Sabah and Covid-19 red zone states, can register themselves from Oct 2 to 4, through drive-through registration.

New and returning students from Sabah and Covid-19 red zone states can register themselves online on Oct 5 at [pohon.usm.my](http://pohon.usm.my) ([http://pohon.usm.my/](http://pohon.usm.my)) or via the **Hebat@USM** application for Android users.

"All students must adhere to the administrative guidelines and standard operating procedures set by the university," USM said in a statement.

The university said returning students, except those from Sabah and Covid-19 red zone states, could register for courses online according to the schedules set, and be in campus from Oct 9.

"All students have to make a health declaration three days prior to entering campus.

"Only parents and their children will be allowed to enter the premises in registered vehicles on a drive-through basis. And only students are allowed to alight from their vehicles with their belongings, while their parents are not allowed to do so.

"All students will undergo Covid-19 screening, and those with symptoms will undergo another screening at USM's Pusat Sejahtera health clinic.

"Students with Covid-19 infection will be quarantined inside the campus."

The university also said students from Sabah and Covid-19 red zone states would be allowed into campus only when the National Security Council and the Health Ministry made an official announcement on the status of the affected areas.

Meanwhile, Universiti Malaya Deputy Vice-Chancellor (students affairs) Professor Ir Dr Abdul Aziz Abdul Raman said the university had postponed face-to-face registration for students from Sabah and all red zone states until further notice.

"The sudden spike in Covid-19 cases in Kuala Lumpur is worrying and we are not ready to gamble on our students' health and safety.

"So we will proceed with the registration of new students as scheduled, but via online for the October intake."

Likewise, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) Deputy Vice-Chancellor (student affairs) Professor Dr Md Amin Md Taff said UPSI had taken proactive steps to facilitate the registration of students even before the ministry's suggestion.

"On Sept 15, UPSI issued a circular to inform students from red zone states to postpone their travel plans back to campus. We also arranged for them to register online."

Dr Amin said the university management had negotiated with airline companies to make some exemptions for students who were returning from Sabah.

"AirAsia and MAS have agreed to allow UPSI students from red zones in Sabah to either postpone their flights or refund their tickets.

"However, these students must be registered with our Student Affairs Department and Ikatan Sepadu Anak Sabah UPSI to get the exemptions."

The Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services welcomed the ministry's suggestion to temporarily restrict students from entering campuses. Its secretary-general, Abdul Rahman Mohd Nordin, said the move would protect employees in universities from the risk of Covid-19 infection.

"The lives of university employees are as important as the students'. Therefore, online registration and learning is the best solution for the time being."