

Establishment of Covid-19 test laboratory in UMS

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UMS Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk ChM. Dr Taufiq Yap Yun Hin (second right) with UMS Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) Assoc Prof Ts Dr Ramzah Dambul during the visit.

KOTA KINABALU: University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) thanked the State Government for providing funding to establish a Covid-19 test laboratory at UMS recently.

RM655,000 was approved by the Chief Minister's Office and was granted to UMS on May 7.

The financial support made it possible for the upgrade of laboratory facilities in the Department of Pathobiology and Medical Diagnostics, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) as well as the continuation of Covid-19 laboratory testing at UMS.

In early February, when the outbreak started to spread to Sabah, the state only had the Public Health Laboratory Kota Kinabalu (PHLKK) to rely on to do its statewide testing locally.

By April, Sabah managed to overcome the backlog in testing due to test reagent shortage, while at the same time establish two more local Covid-19 test laboratories; one at Queen Elizabeth Hospital I (QE I) and another at UMS Biotechnology Research Institute (BRI).

On June 25, the Sabah Government-supported Covid-19 test laboratory took over testing activities from BRI, permitting the research institute to resume its core business of academic research and postgraduate teaching.

The Covid-19 test laboratory at FMHS is a seamless cooperation between the faculty and Hospital Universiti Malaysia Sabah (HUMS).

Nasopharyngeal swabs are taken by well-trained and qualified healthcare staff at HUMS's University Health Centre and delivered straight to the laboratory. All test records and results are entered into the Sistem Informasi Makmal Kesihatan Awam (SIMKA), which is the Public Health Laboratory Information System of the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOHM).

In addition to the standard Real Time RT-PCR test, the lab also tests samples using the MOHM-approved Rapid Antigen Test Kit.

One month into its service, the lab to date has tested 909 samples, of which 329 are from Kota Kinabalu Regional Health Office (KKRHO), 79 from the private sectors, and 501 from within UMS. The recent doubling of active Covid-19 case number since mid-July 2020 highlighted the importance of having an ongoing, robust and rapid diagnostic testing service.

Without such test, quarantine becomes inefficient, precious resources become easily prone to wastage, and the risk of infection in the population becomes amplified.

The funding support to upgrade laboratory facilities at FMHS and subsequently to establish the Covid-19 test laboratory, attested to the commitment of the then Sabah State Government to protect its people from the spread of Covid-19.

On behalf of the People and residents of Sabah, utmost gratitude to the former Sabah State Government, for its people-oriented governance. UMS also would like to thank Sabah State Health Department, PHLKK, KKRHO, QE I, BRI and various agencies and departments for the opportunity to serve the people hand-in-hand with them.