



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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## Press Statement

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### **CAP: Strictly enforce the legislation pertaining to food safety**

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) calls upon the Ministry of Health to strictly enforce the legislation pertaining to food safety in view of the recent spate of food poisoning cases in the country related to non-compliance to food safety regulations.

The latest is the case of 99 students and teachers from a Batu Pahat secondary school who suffered food poisoning symptoms after consuming food from the school canteen. Earlier in June during a school programme in Gombak, Selangor, a two-year-old girl and a 17-year-old boy died after consuming food at the school programme. Alongside these fatalities, 82 other individuals who attended the same programme suffered food poisoning symptoms, underscoring the severe and widespread impact of such outbreaks.

The prevalence of food poisoning cases, especially within school settings, poses a significant threat to public health and safety. In the first half of 2024 alone, numerous incidents have been reported, emphasising the urgency of addressing this issue. Schoolchildren are becoming primary victims of food poisoning incidents across the country. Children with compromised immune systems are more susceptible to contracting food poisoning.

Another tragic case occurred last year in Terengganu where a 54-year-old woman died of suspected food poisoning. She reportedly suffered symptoms of food poisoning from eating a sandwich she bought at the Perasing rest and recreation (R&R) area in Kemaman, Terengganu.

The high incidence of food poisoning cases in the country are partly attributed to its climate conditions and typical cuisine features. The hot and humid climate and the combination of various raw ingredients in typical Malaysian cuisine could enhance the likelihood of food contamination and spoilage which often results in an increased incidence of food poisoning.

Other factors that could lead to food poisoning incidents are cross-contamination and improper thawing and cooking practices caused by poor or inadequate food-handling practices from food handlers.

The most common locations where food poisoning was reported were public schools, with the highest number of cases in the boarding school kitchen, followed by school canteens. Communal kitchens in boarding schools which are designed to store large amounts of raw materials for cooking are susceptible to food spoilage.

Poor pest control measures and the heightened risk of cross-contamination during food handling including transport and delivery of raw materials and cooked food, as well as inadequate control of the manufacturing process such as temperature control and storage conditions were identified as critical factors contributing toward outbreaks.

Therefore, targeted education for food handlers is essential to improve their knowledge of food safety and food-borne illnesses which could influence their future behaviour and practices related to food safety.

In view of the rising number of food poisoning cases occurring in the country, CAP calls upon the Ministry of Health to:

- strictly enforce the legislation pertaining to food safety
- conduct regular checks and enforcement on food premises
- educate consumers through social media on how to prevent food poisoning.

Meanwhile, consumers are advised to raise their standards and stop giving business to places with poor hygiene standards. This is one of the most effective ways to pressure food sellers to buck up on their unhygienic practices.

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