

- Virus

Maintaining air quality vital to prevent infection

New Straits Times · 27 May 2021 · 20 · JN ISMAIL Shah Alam, Selangor

last year, several studies have found that the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19 spreads mainly through the air. But other studies, including a recent one funded by the World Health Organisation (WHO), found the evidence inconclusive.



A team of experts has looked at available research and published their assessment in *The Lancet* saying that there is strong, consistent evidence that the primary transmission route of SARS-CoV-2 is indeed airborne.

On May 7, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a new advisory on the transmission of the coronavirus and highlighted three primary ways in which a person can contract Covid-19.

It says the virus spreads primarily through inhalation, deposition and touching. The advisory says when one inhales air carrying very small droplets or aerosol particles containing the virus, one gets infected.

It highlights that the risk of transmission is greatest 3ft to 6ft from an infected person as the droplets are very fine. It says these droplets spread through exhalation during quiet breathing, speaking, singing, exercise, coughing and sneezing.

This means that in enclosed spaces or poorly ventilated areas, there is an increased chance of this disease spreading from one person to another.

Airborne does not mean it is in the air and wherever you are you can catch it. If there is a Covid-19-positive person in a small room or an enclosed space that lacks ventilation and the person coughs, the aerosol particles remain suspended in the air for 30 minutes to one hour. The Covid-19 pandemic has almost overnight changed the working practices of millions of people around the world. For many, working from home has become routine for several

months, while those who have continued to work at their workplaces have had to follow new work practices and procedures to prevent the transmission of infections.

Anyone going to their workplace — and to educational institutions, cafes, restaurants and shops — will be nervous about getting infected if they come into close contact with other people. By now, everyone should be aware of the risk of infection from airborne particles and the guidelines for physical distancing.

However, keeping a distance from other people may not be enough to prevent contaminated particles from transferring from infected people to others. Research has shown that the smallest particles can travel farther and remain airborne for much longer than previously thought.

This means air hygiene is a crucial factor in protecting people in the workplace and other indoor environments and should be included in measures that businesses must take to prevent the transmission of Covid-19.

It's also important for employees to see that their air quality is being improved. In an international survey of office workers commissioned by Rentokil Initial in March last year, more than two-thirds of survey respondents said they would feel cared for by their employers if indoor air quality was monitored or regulated.

As Covid-19 is spread through infected respiratory particles, filtering pathogens from the air will be seen by employers and staff as a reassuring and necessary first step to prevent infections, reduce incidence of ill health, absenteeism and keep workers safe at work.