

Did the first Movement Control Order impact healthcare seeking behaviour and healthcare access among Malaysians? Findings from a cross-sectional survey

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In March 2020, Malaysia initiated the first Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the spread of COVID-19 infections. While healthcare services remained operational, fears of contracting COVID-19 may have impacted health seeking behaviours and healthcare access. A survey was conducted to investigate how the first MCO impacted actions of individuals experiencing upper respiratory tract infection versus other symptoms, routine follow-up visits, and refill prescription practices. **Methods:** A cross-sectional survey among adult Malaysians was conducted from November to December 2020. A self-administered questionnaire was developed, validated, and disseminated on social media and communication platforms. **Results:** 3001 participants responded to the survey. 486 (16.0%) of them reported being unwell during the MCO. Regardless of symptoms, actions taken to seek medical care were similar. The most common action on average was visiting a medical doctor (55.0%), followed by self-medicating at home (38.0%). 588 participants had a scheduled appointment for their medical condition during the MCO. 253 of them had their appointments affected by the lockdown, for examples, 85.0% postponed, 12% cancelled, 9.0% referred. Only 42.3% of these affected participants saw a doctor within 3 months after the first MCO. Out of 487 participants who regularly collected medications from the pharmacy, 69.0% had a prescription refill appointment during the lockdown. Only 15.0% of them did not collect their medications on the scheduled date. **Conclusion:** The first MCO did not severely affect health seeking behaviour and prescription refill practices. However, there are concerns over timely access to follow-up appointments due to extensive rescheduling and backlogs triggered by the pandemic.