

'Resolve vax, MySejahtera issues first'

Issues such as inefficiency in vaccine distribution and technical hiccups in the MySejahtera application should first be resolved if there is a plan to revoke people's vaccination status when their Covid-19 inoculation coverage has lapsed.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations president Datuk Dr Marimuthu Nadason commended the move, but questioned whether people would encounter lagging updates on MySejahtera when they were fully vaccinated, a technical problem that had cropped up some months ago.

He also pointed to another technical issue earlier this month, where numerous random users were put under home surveillance orders and marked as persons under surveillance, leading to claims that some people had been prevented from boarding flights.

"It (booster shot administration) needs to be fast and on schedule. We should be able to know when and where we are getting our shot weeks before we are scheduled to get it.

"This is how the system has to be if we plan to move to the endemic phase.

"If a Sinovac or Pfizer recipient's immunity lapses three and six months (respectively) after they are fully vaccinated, the system should automatically load a date and venue based on that.

"Things have to be planned three or six months in advance. We need to get these things right, we can't afford to go through the same thing we did with the vaccination earlier," he said in response to the Health Ministry's decision to consider such a possibility.

He said more than 30,000 people had died in Malaysia so far, many due to a dearth in supplies and a slow distribution of vaccines.

Marimuthu also said it was crucial for roughly 9.3 million Sinovac recipients to get their booster shots on schedule, regardless of age, as studies had indicated that recipients had little or no immunity after three months.

He reiterated his call for booster shots to be offered at a price at private facilities to enable the jabs to be distributed at a quicker rate.

Marimuthu, however, said the government must set a ceiling price for the public, while ensuring supplies for frontliners, high-risk groups and those in the B40 group were prioritised and given for free.

Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia president Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh said based on past experience with the first batch of vaccine recipients, the current phase (of administering booster shots) was the most challenging as they included frontliners, the elderly and those with comorbidities, whose immunity level could drop at the same time.

"The time factor is always an issue.

"We didn't have enough supplies due to the sheer number of people in the initial batches and then in July and August, there was so much to the point that the no-shows became more apparent."

On the government mulling over the possibility of making the booster shot a criterion to categorise a person as fully vaccinated, Dr Kuljit said such a consideration was acceptable for now, as everyone was still learning about the virus with countries still reviewing the data on vaccination.

Public health expert Dr Tharani Loganathan said boosters should be offered to migrants in the same way they are offered to Malaysians.

"The vaccination policy in Malaysia should be standard without discrimination between Malaysians and non-Malaysians. It should be the same across the board according to eligibility and rollout criteria.

"We need to protect the general population. We can't have cases going up and hospitals being overrun again."

She, however, said the Health Ministry had to first determine if everyone in the migrant community had been vaccinated.

The universal healthcare advocate said this was a major stumbling block as the authorities had, time and again, stated that the denominators were based on the statistics department's (denominators), which were flawed as migrants, especially the undocumented, did not want to be on any database for fear of legal repercussions.

In October, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said foreigners made up 3,006,987 of the 24.7 million people in Malaysia who had received at least one dose of the vaccine.

He said this meant that the ministry had vaccinated those who were not in the **Department of Statistics Malaysia's** count, estimated to be under three million.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/11/748530/resolve-vax-mysejahtera-issues-first>