

Vaccination Can Prevent Infectious Disease Among High-Risk Working Adults

KUALA LUMPUR, August 1 – Respiratory physicians have urged high-risk young adults in the Malaysian workforce to get themselves vaccinated against infectious diseases, including pneumococcal pneumonia.

Studies have shown that vaccination has a positive impact on economic growth by maintaining a higher productivity rate due to improved health of a workforce. (15)

Dr Hilmi Lockman, a consultant respiratory physician at Prince Court Medical Centre, said besides elderly people aged above 65 years (1), individuals with other non-communicable diseases such as chronic heart diseases, diabetes, and respiratory diseases, as well as immunocompromised people, including people who undergo organ transplants and cancer patients (2,3), are at risk of contracting pneumococcal pneumonia.

He said that patients who are suffering from immunodeficiency, chronic renal failure, malignancy, and those who undergo immunosuppressive or radiation therapy, are at high risk of acquiring pneumococcal pneumonia. (2)

“Studies from European countries showed that pneumococcal disease causes a severe health and financial burden.” (4)

“This could be applicable in Malaysia as well,” Dr Hilmi told CodeBlue.

“We should start reflecting on how much pneumonia would cost for adults with comorbidities and in the workforce.”

Vaccination is a substantial preventive measure to provide good protection to the workforce against vaccine preventable diseases and ensures less health and economic burden of a country. (16)

Based on a cost analysis conducted in the United States, pneumococcal pneumonia leads to an annual direct cost about US\$3.7 billion among adults aged above 50. Besides the direct cost, the US also reported US\$1.8 billion in total indirect costs due to the disease. (5)

Many high-income countries continue to suffer the burden of worsened pneumococcal disease, amid a rise in the number of people with chronic disease or HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and an ageing population. (6)

Malaysia, as an upper middle-income country, is transitioning into an ageing nation. (17,18) According to the **Department of Statistics Malaysia**, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 7 to 7.4 per cent in 2021. (7)

The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019 by the Ministry of Health (MOH) reported that about 8.1 per cent of the adult population in Malaysia, or 1.7 million people, have all three risk factors for diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. (8)

Malaysia’s Global AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) Monitoring Report 2020 stated that an estimated 87,000 people in Malaysia were living with HIV in 2019. (9)

That includes an estimate of 66,369 males and 11,233 females aged above 15 years. (9)

“We have anti-discriminatory policies for employees who are suffering from HIV,” said Dr Hilmi. (10)

“I feel that employers should also try to protect the well-being of economically active HIV or AIDS patients by encouraging them to take vaccines to prevent infectious diseases including pneumococcal pneumonia”

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasises the importance of vaccination as one of the best health investments that can prevent deaths and control infectious disease outbreaks. (15)

Prof Dr Abdul Razak Muttalif, senior consultant chest physician and professor (Head of Medicine) at MAHSA University, said people with underlying health conditions, as well as immunocompromised people, including younger adults, are at risk of contracting pneumococcal pneumonia (11,12).

“These individuals should consider getting pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine as vaccines can provide protection against invasive pneumonia,” Dr Abdul Razak told CodeBlue. (13)

Dr Abdul Razak, who concurred with Dr Hilmi, mentioned that immunocompromised people, like cancer patients with weak immune systems, are at risk of contracting pneumonia. (2,3)

Dr Abdul Razak highlighted that immunocompromised people have weak immune systems that can lead to contracting other communicable diseases. (14)

“Patients with HIV or AIDS, cancer and transplant patients, as well as patients who undergo immunosuppressive treatment, tend to have a weak or suppressed immune system due to the different conditions of treatment.” (14)

It is important to note that people with compromised immune systems after undergoing treatment are also vulnerable to infection with pneumococcal pneumonia. (14)

“Maybe we should start thinking to prevent the current workforce from getting infected with infectious diseases like pneumococcal pneumonia,” said Dr Abdul Razak.

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