

# MTUC, MEF say need to improve migrant workers Covid-19 inoculation drive

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KUALA LUMPUR: Reports and pictures of long queues of migrant workers sweating under the scorching sun and getting drenched in the rain to get their Covid-19 inoculation at some vaccination centres (PPVs) here has not gone down well with the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC).

While applauding the move to ramp up vaccination among migrant workers, MTUC deputy president Mohd Effendy Abdul Ghani said he felt that there was still room for improvement.

"A few days ago, I noticed a picture showing a long queue of migrant workers waiting under the scorching sun at a PPV in the Klang Valley.

"I do not know why such a situation occurred, but it is a pity for the migrant workers who have to endure waiting under the scorching sun to get their shot of the Covid-19 vaccine.

"Taking into consideration the prevalence of the highly contagious Delta variant, I do not think it is a wise idea of sending a large group of workers at one go.

"I fear that this would increase the risk of the PPV becoming a hotspot of the Covid-19 outbreak," he said.

Effendy said there should be no double standards against migrant workers since they are among the workforce in the country and have contributed to Malaysia's development.

He proposed the government reduce dependency on mega PPVs by dividing the number of vaccine recipients involving migrant workers into smaller groups and there are other premises, including clinics, which can administer Covid-19 vaccine.

This, said Effendy, could also speed up the inoculation drive while reducing the risk of PPVs emerging as potential Covid-19 clusters.

"The authorities should also rope in embassies in this initiative if language barrier is a concern. I am sure the foreign embassies and mission also want to do their part in helping Malaysia to get as many as (of their) people in the country vaccinated at a faster pace," he said.

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) believes too many migrant workers flooding a PPV at any one time could be due to delayed response to applications submitted by employers.

Its president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said employers also find it tough to get a definite answer on when the vaccination can be done for their migrant employees.

"All these are happening when nationwide the average vaccination rate had been over 500,000 doses for the last few days," he said.

He said some employers who have enrolled workers under the Public-Private Partnership Industrial Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (PIKAS) also could not cancel their registrations after

receiving slots under the Covid-19 National Immunisation Plan (NIP).

Employers still had to bear the cost incurred for such slots under PIKAS Syed Hussain said.

In attempts to resolve the problems, the affected members made official enquiry via the official NIP enquiry email but to no avail, he said.

"A 24-hour national one-stop centre should be set up to address issues faced by employers in the private sector in getting Covid-19 vaccination for their staff.

"The centre would help address the slow progress of the vaccination exercise among private employees, including foreigners, under the PIKAS," he said.

He said on-site vaccination was a better option as there would not be any time loss due to travel time to and from the PPV.

The presence of employees at the on-site facility could be controlled by the management and there would be no issues of overcrowding, he said.

He added that most employees, especially foreign workers, depended on the transportation provided by their employers to go to the PPV to be vaccinated.

Under such circumstances, employers should also plan to drop their workers off at their set vaccination appointments at the PPV.

"Unfortunately, on July 28, many employers had dropped off their employees too early and had caused overcrowding at the Kuala Lumpur Conventional Centre PPV, which resulted in a very long queue of hundreds of vaccine recipients at main the entrance and

along the main road pavements."

Police recently urged employers to not drop their migrant workers too early at the PPV. This, the police had said, to avoid overcrowding at the PPV as what had took place at the KLCC PPV.

Dang Wangi police chief Assistant Commissioner Mohamad Zainal Abdullah had said that employers should follow the scheduled time slots for their worker's appointments.

The Covid-19 Immunisation Task Force (CITF), in a statement recently, noted that congestions occurred when many vaccine recipients did not follow the appointment time given, for example, coming in the morning while the appointment time was in the afternoon.

The CITF had also said that it was considering the need to designate PPVs to cater to foreign workers according to language, the vaccination process can be conducted smoothly.

The move, said the task force, was to enable the required resources, such as translators or volunteers, to be stationed there, thus overcoming the problem of overcrowding in PPVs caused by the presence in large numbers of this group, resulting in a violation of standard operating procedures (SOP).