

Proposed guidelines for fully vaccinated individuals must include SOPs

PETALING JAYA: The proposed guidelines for individuals who received two doses of the Covid-19 vaccines should be clear, consistent and include proper SOPs to protect the health and safety of employees and the *rakyat*.

MEF President Dato' Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman J.P., in commenting on recent reports that Health Minister YB Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba would present the proposed guidelines to the National Security Council (NSC) at a special conference, said SOPs should still apply to those who completed the vaccinations as there was no guarantee that the vaccines would fully protect against Covid-19.

"MEF supports the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (NIP) as based on the experiences of other countries thus far, fully vaccinated individuals were allowed to move freely and that those infected suffered less severely, not requiring intensive care and thus do not over burden the public health system," he said today.

"We are also of the view that employers should be encouraged to provide vaccines for their employees and be allowed to operate under SOPs through the PIKAS and Selvac targeted vaccination schemes.

"At the same time however, it is also understood that presently there is no clinical evidence to show that those who received two doses of the vaccine would be free from Covid-19.

"It has also been found that Covid-19 has mutations with the emergence of new and more virulent variants for which there is also no clinical evidence to show that the vaccines would be effective protection.

"There are already plans in the United States and Europe to deploy a third vaccine booster to the public to cope with the outbreak of these Covid-19 variants.

"According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) of the United States, fully vaccinated individuals could still be required to be screened if they experience Covid-19 symptoms.

"They are also prohibited from entering public places if confirmed positive for Covid-19.

"Therefore, those who have been inoculated would still need to comply with the SOPs as there is no clinical evidence that the vaccines could fully protect against Covid-19 infection, or protect others from being infected."

Referring to the Guidance and Requirements on Conditional Registration of Pharmaceutical Products During Disaster issued by the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) under the Ministry of Health – that indicated the vaccines were required to undergo accelerated three-year clinical trials beginning in 2021, Dato' Dr Syed Hussain said that the government should also establish an official public platform for those who had received the vaccines throughout the clinical trials period and beyond.

“As employers, we are concerned for the safety and health of all our employees including those who had received the vaccines and propose that the government establish a platform whereby adverse events, if any, could be recorded, monitored and reported,” he said.

“For example, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) that is jointly managed by the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States was set up ‘as a post-marketing surveillance programme to collect information about adverse events that occur after administration of vaccines to ascertain whether the risk–benefit ratio justifies continued use of any particular vaccine.’

“Besides this, the authorities should ensure that the NIP and related guidelines include awareness programmes on the benefits and risks of Covid-19 vaccinations in accordance with the rights of the individual, professional medical ethics and the legal principles of informed consent.

“The lives of the *rakyat* must be held sacred and be protected and by putting in place such interventions would also help validate the vaccine’s safety and efficacy and dispel rumours and fake news.

“MEF is of the view that the proposed guidelines for those who received two vaccine doses should be subjected to SOPs and should not discriminate individuals who have not yet received two doses of vaccine to avoid human rights violations, legal complications and negative social control policies.

“Furthermore, we have to accept that Covid-19 is already endemic and that the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342) does not make the Covid-19 vaccination mandatory as under the present law it still remains voluntary.

“Even if we achieve herd immunity, the *rakyat* must continue to follow SOPs to protect themselves and others from the Covid-19 variants.

“We urge the authorities to involve industry stakeholders, professional medical practitioners, as well as experts in other fields in the formulation of the SOPs to ensure its practicality and effectiveness for the benefit of all parties.

“There has to be collective responsibility between the stakeholders to deal effectively with Covid-19.

“We hope the guidelines would be standardised, clear and without variations to avoid confusion to both employers and employees.

“There should only be one policy for the proposed guidelines under one agency to handle all the queries.

“We thank the government for their efforts to deploy the vaccines but the *rakyat* should also protect themselves and support the government’s efforts.”

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