

Booster move harsh but necessary, says health expert

By **Imran Ariff** - December 17, 2021 9:14 AM

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Health minister Khairy Jamaluddin says those above 60 and Sinovac recipients above 18 will no longer be considered fully vaccinated after February if they have not received a booster shot.

PETALING JAYA: Making boosters mandatory if one wants to maintain their fully vaccinated status may be a harsh move, but a health expert says it has to be done.

Yesterday, health minister Khairy Jamaluddin said those over the age of 60 will no longer be considered fully vaccinated after February if they have not received a Covid-19 booster shot. For Sinovac recipients, this applies to everyone over the age of 18.



Azrul Mohd Khalib.

Azrul Mohd Khalib, CEO of the Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy, said the reasoning behind this "shifting of goalposts" must be clearly communicated to the public.

"No, it's not fair, but the policy is necessary and reflects new and hard realities," he told FMT.

"We are guided by the science and what we know regarding the virus and its variants. This latest variant Omicron is a more transmissible version."

In light of this, and with the efficacy of certain vaccines appearing to wane quicker than others, boosters have now become a necessity, he said.

Dr Koh Kar Chai, president of the Malaysian Medical Association, encouraged eligible recipients to get their booster jabs when offered.

"We believe the health minister has valid concerns, as the protective effect of vaccines wanes over time and it may not offer enough protection against new variants such as the highly transmissible

Omicron," he said.



Dr Koh Kar Chai.

On vaccine hesitancy, which has in part led to the slow take-up of boosters and thus the ministry's ruling, Koh said the government must better educate the public about mixed dose regimes.

"The government needs to increase awareness on the safety of heterologous vaccination through the sharing of evidence recognised by leading health authorities," he said.

Currently, only vaccines made by Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca and Sinovac have been approved for use as boosters. The first two have also been approved for use in people who did not receive them during their initial stages of vaccination.

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