

Children below 12 should be vaccinated to boost safety at school

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The Malaysian Medical Association president has given an assurance that the vaccine used for the PICKids programme is safe. – Adib Rawi Yahya/theSun

KUALA LUMPUR: To parents who are still in two minds about vaccinating their young children against Covid-19, medical experts have this piece of advice: Have

them take the jab.

Given that classes are resuming, every effort must be made to keep children safe when they are back in school, said Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai.

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To assuage parents' fears about side effects and reactions to the vaccine, Koh gave an assurance that it is safe for young children.

The Covid-19 National Immunisation Programme for Children (PICKids) kicked off in the Klang Valley on Feb 3 and covers children aged five to 12.

Koh pointed out that with teenagers and adults largely vaccinated, the time had come to vaccinate young children.

"This is the next step in the national effort to bring the pandemic under control."

He said the vaccine for those aged 12 and below, which has been given conditional approval by the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency, was formulated for this particular group of children.

"This is a new paediatric vaccine. Paediatricians and general practitioners have been vaccinating children from birth and are therefore experienced in this," he said to allay fears of possible side effects.

He said in any case, the programme is voluntary and parents should be the ones to decide on the welfare of their children.

Koh added that parents who are still hesitant should speak to their children's doctor.

"Don't be quick to trust messages on vaccination for children that have been shared on social media.

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"Instead, parents should arm themselves with the proper knowledge based on scientific evidence from recognised health authorities to ensure peace of mind," he said.

Ara Damansara Medical Centre consultant paediatrician and head of paediatrics Dr Rakhee Yadav said the vaccines given to children were different from those given to adults.

“Each child will receive a dose of 0.2ml, which contains 10 micrograms of the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA paediatric vaccine. This is one-third of what is given to adults,” she told *theSun*.

To parents who are concerned about the long-term effects, Rakhee said they should understand that the vaccine stays in the body only for a few hours.

“The vaccine is designed to break down into smaller proteins by normal physiological processes and leave the body within hours. Its only purpose is to send a signal to the body’s immune system to create antibodies and once it has done so, the vaccine will be degraded and leaves the body,” she said.

Rakhee added that if parents were concerned about allergic reactions, they should have their children vaccinated at medical facilities or hospitals rather than vaccination centres.

“Medical personnel are always on standby at hospitals to treat them if necessary,” she said, adding that the vaccine is safe and has a 91% efficacy rate against Covid-19.

According to Rakhee, there have been no major safety concerns and the vaccine has been used in more than 100 countries and almost 10 million children have received it.

Under PICKids, a special vaccine formulation for children by Pfizer is used. It is a two-dose regime, with an eight-week interval.

The programme is not compulsory and would prioritise children with underlying conditions such as chronic respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, immunosuppression, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and nerve disease.

Registration is via MySejahtera under the “vaccine dependent” option and parents can choose the date, time and place they wish to have their children vaccinated.