

Experts: Don't postpone boosters

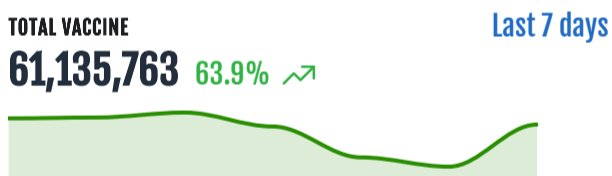


By [Adib Povera](#) - January 21, 2022 @ 9:00am



People registering to get their booster shot at World Trade Centre Kuala Lumpur yesterday. -NSTP/FATHIL ASRI

COVID VACCINATION



KUALA LUMPUR: Health experts are not in favour of the call by Perlis Mufti Datuk Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin to postpone Covid-19 booster shots.

They said postponing booster jabs would delay the restoration and development of antibodies to protect the community against the virus, more so in the wake of more contagious variants, such as Omicron, or future variants.

One expert, however, agreed that the Health Ministry should look into concerns raised by Asri and others over side-effects or adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) after receiving their booster jab.

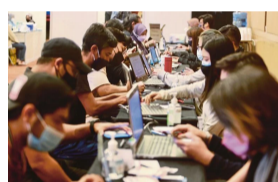
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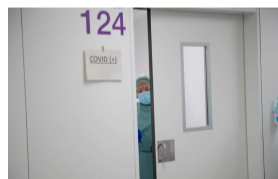
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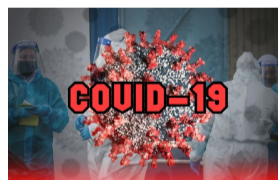
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Volunteers for Community Engagement and Empowerment for Covid-19 organisation chairman Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar added the ministry should also be more transparent and update incidences involving AEFI.

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"I agree with the Perlis mufti's proposal for the ministry to relook the policy of booster doses, especially for certain groups, but not (for calls to) postpone the booster dose programme.



Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar.

"So far, the public's acceptability is very good," Dr Zainal, an epidemiologist, said.

Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman, a Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist and biostatistician, said postponing the vaccination would delay the provision of antibody protection to the community, particularly those who were at high risk.

This, she said, would expose them to infections and possible complications linked to Covid-19.

"The administration of the vaccines follows clinical and ethical protocols.

"There is also substantial medical evidence to prove that vaccines, in general, are safe and effective.

"However, some adverse side-effects have been reported, but the incidence is very rare.



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Dr Malina Osman.

"Looking at the severity of the outbreaks on mortality and complications of those suffering from symptoms associated with long Covid (morbidity associated with Covid infection), the benefits of the vaccine outweigh its risk."

Echoing both experts was former Malaysian Medical Association president Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan.

He said data evidence collated by scientists and researchers supported giving a booster dose to those who had completed their primary vaccination, as the effect of the primary vaccine waned after a few months.

The administration of the booster dose, he said, was well-justified and it had received backing from the World Health Organisation and was adopted by all countries.



Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan.

Dr Tharmaseelan added there were also studies being conducted, and awaiting results, on the safety and need for the fourth dose or second round of booster jab.

"Any drug or vaccine can cause side-effects, depending on the immune system and the person's health. There are some who even develop side-effects with common drugs like Panadol.

"The Drug Control Authority will vouch for the fact many approved drugs and vaccines may cause an occasional side-effect.

"The studies are scrutinised and analysed before drugs and vaccinations are approved for the safety and protection of the vast majority even if there are isolated incidences (of AEFI)."

Furthermore, he said, many countries were already widening the net by including teenagers in their vaccination campaign.

"Thus, the call to postpone vaccine boosters is untimely and unwarranted."

It was reported that Asri had called on the ministry to consider postponing booster doses for fear of serious side-effects.

He had said that the postponement should take into account a clear statement on who or which group should receive the booster.

Asri's father had been hospitalised for the past week, with his health deteriorating after receiving the booster dose.

He had claimed that his father had vomited and became very weak following the shot.

Dr Zainal and Dr Malina said the ministry should continue educating the public to allay concerns among some groups about the side-effects of the booster jab.

Dr Zainal said: "The ministry should share more information on the definition of AEFI and the monitoring mechanism, including reporting."

Dr Malina said educating the public on how to identify AEFI and ways to seek treatment clinically should be continuously done.

She said data on patients suffering from long Covid with multiple complications should be compared with data on AEFI, which should be made available to the public.

She highlighted an issue when the vaccinations were no longer administered at vaccination centres (PPV) but were decentralised to private clinics.

"Some of those who received the booster at private clinics describe the experience as very different compared with PPVs in which the explanation on the vaccine, particularly on side-effects, was not given at all.

"Constant reminders to medical practitioners to provide information should be carried out for those involved with vaccination."

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