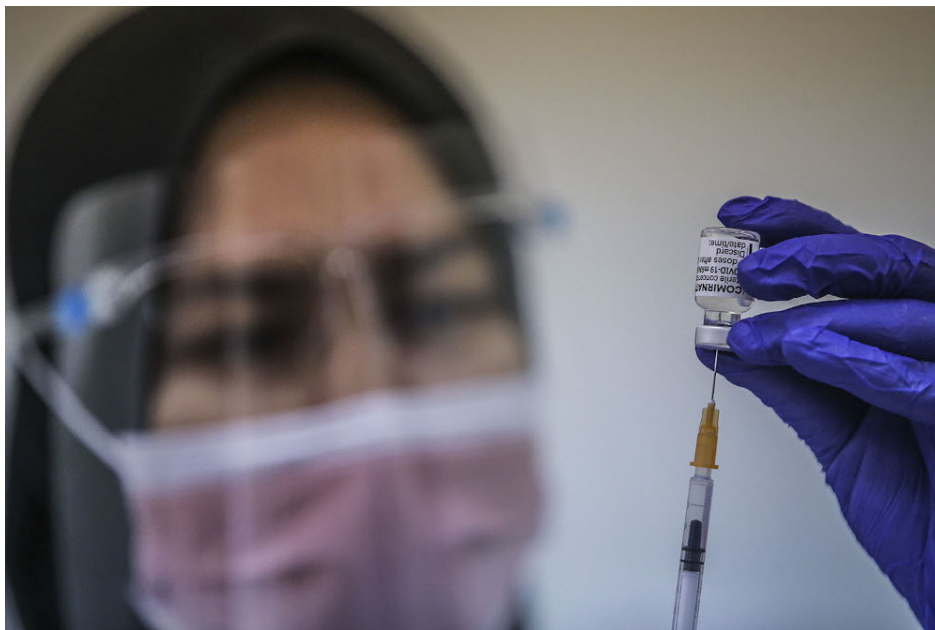


Malaysian Medical Association: Utilise public healthcare facilities instead of using Mega PPVs

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SARAWAK



A medical staff preparing a Covid-19 vaccine shot. – MalayMail photo

KUCHING (Dec 18): The Ministry of Health (MOH) should use the funds and resources to strengthen public healthcare facilities instead of using Mega PPVs (Covid-19 vaccination centres) to speed up the administering of booster shots, said Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai.

He said this was because there were already 2,459 private PPVs administering the shots nationwide.

“Currently, on average, over 130,000 booster doses are being administered daily by the private PPVs registered under ProtectHealth. These private PPVs include private GPs, specialist clinics, private hospitals, ambulatory care centres, offsite/outreach PPVs and NGOs.

“The total number of booster shots administered so far is at 4.2 million or 18 per cent of the population. Its programme, coordinated by ProtectHealth, a company

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under the MOH, is being run smoothly, however there is a high dropout rate in appointments for the booster shots.

"This is what needs to be addressed, only then can we see a significant improvement in booster uptake," he said in a statement today.

Dr Koh said according to ProtectHealth, the capacity utilisation at private PPVs was only at 60 per cent now.

He asserted that the government should work towards getting the remainder 40 per cent to come for their appointments.

He said MMA had stated before that there was hesitancy among the public on receiving heterologous vaccination therefore more efforts are needed to reassure the public that heterologous boosters are safe.

"From the feedback we are receiving, many are unwilling to receive the Pfizer shot after being fully vaccinated with Sinovac. When there is no choice given, many will choose not to accept the booster shot.

"There is no point in opening up large facilities to administer boosters when the dropout rate is high. It will be a waste of funds and resources which can be put to better use in areas more urgently needing help in our healthcare system," he said.

Earlier this year, when the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme was launched, Dr Koh said civil servants, army personnel, traffic police, Rela, volunteers, public healthcare workers were roped in from all over the country to manage crowd control and registration at Mega PPVs nationwide.

He said MMA was informed that while the venue was provided free of charge, the government had to pay for utilities such as electricity and the set up which was a costly affair.

"Public healthcare workers should now be at the public healthcare facilities they are serving in as there are shortages in manpower in almost all the country's public healthcare facilities.

"Appointments at public hospitals are also now picking up as many had earlier postponed their appointments due to lockdowns or fear of contracting Covid-19," he added.

Dr Koh said there were also many cases of Mega PPV clusters, and now with the highly transmissible Omicron variant, Malaysia could see another superspreader event.

He said the MOH should instead encourage private medical practitioners to open more smaller outreach PPVs within the community instead of a bigger PPV.

As such, he urged the MOH to reconsider its plans and focus on reassuring the public on heterologous booster safety through the sharing of sufficient evidence recognised by leading health authorities while the private PPVs do its part in partnership with the government in administering the booster doses.

“Private medical practitioners have contributed to 48 per cent of total vaccinations nationwide. We believe booster uptake will improve in the coming weeks but the people will need some convincing and encouragement.

“One of the best ways to achieve this is through the PPV GPs who are regularly in contact with their patients.

“The impersonal nature of the Mega PPVs will do little to counter vaccine hesitancy and will instead cast aspersion on why the government is in a rush to administer booster shots to everyone. It may be counterproductive,” Dr Koh added.



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