

Covid-19 vaccine deal includes access to new versions, says KJ

By **Ainaa Aiman** - February 17, 2021 4:01 PM

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Khairy Jamaluddin (right) speaking at the virtual press conference from his office. With him is deputy chief of army Lt Gen Mohammad Ab Rahman. (Bernama pic)

PETALING JAYA: The government's agreements with vaccine suppliers have clauses enabling the country to receive any upgraded Covid-19 vaccine in light of emerging virus mutations and variants worldwide.

Science, technology and innovation minister Khairy Jamaluddin told a press conference on the setting up of the Covid-19 immunisation task force today, that the contracts with anti-variant clauses would enable Malaysia to get newer vaccines, when they are ready.

He was responding to reports that the European Union was adding clauses to contracts with Covid-19 vaccine makers which would allow the bloc to access upgraded shots that might offer better protection against newer variants of the virus.

Previously, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin revealed that the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine would arrive in Malaysia on Feb 21, followed by the roll-out of vaccines on Feb 26.

Khairy, who is also coordinating minister for the immunisation programme, said 300,000 doses had been allocated for medical frontliners in the first phase of vaccinations. The government has also allocated another 200,000 doses for non-medical frontliners, which includes security personnel, welfare officers and politicians.

Speaking on the expected challenges of the first roll-out, Khairy said the government would need to ensure that the transportation and storage for the Pfizer vaccines was seamless to avoid potential wastage.

The Pfizer vaccine requires ultra-cold storage of -70°C. Khairy previously announced that the government had spent RM16.6 million on cold storage equipment and medical supplies for the vaccine.

It was also reported that the government had approved the purchase of 55 ultra-low temperature freezers, costing between RM70,000 and RM80,000 each.

Meanwhile, he said the government was preparing a risk assessment framework to ensure those receiving vaccines in the first phase were truly at risk of getting exposed to the virus.

He said the list of frontliners was still under review for the remaining 200,000 non-health essential workers such as immigration, police and armed forces.

"We will be informing them (frontliners) very soon whether they are chosen and when and where they will be vaccinated."

On undocumented foreign workers and refugees, he said the government would need to build trust with the community to ensure that they would come forward to get vaccinated.

He said there had to be a clear message that individuals could come out to be vaccinated freely without getting arrested. "I think that's the most important message we need to send out."

He added the authorities would work with international and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to reach out to undocumented foreign workers, in addition to working with foreign embassies.

As for documented foreign workers, he said the government would work with their employers to get them vaccinated.

He said the Covid-19 national immunisation task force had already asked the home affairs ministry to come up with an implementation plan for these communities.

Besides reaching out to undocumented migrants and refugees, he said civil society would need to help the government educate individuals in deep, interior areas, including Orang Asli villages.

"We will need them to assist us in reaching out to these areas," he said, adding that the government would also be identifying a few NGOs and community leaders to be a part of the Covid-19 immunisation task force.

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