

Vaccine protection scheme must be transparent



By CLARISSA CHUNG

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PETALING JAYA: The special protection scheme for Covid-19 vaccine side effects must clearly set out key details such as eligibility criteria and the timeframe for greater transparency, say legal experts.

Lawyer Charlene Chin, who specialises in medico-legal cases, said the eligibility criteria should include whether this would be open to all people under the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme or only for a selected portion.

“There should also be clear guidelines on the side effects and the severity that are covered under the scheme. This is to ensure that the same yardstick is applicable across the board,” she said.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin had said that details of the plan would be announced tomorrow.

Health experts have been giving reassurances that it is rare for individuals to suffer from severe side effects.

Citing the example of Singapore’s Vaccine Injury Financial Assistance Programme for Covid-19, Chin said individuals eligible for the scheme were those who had a side effect that was “potentially life-threatening or fatal and had required in-patient hospitalisation, or had caused persistent incapacity or disability”.

“The scheme should also be easily accessible to all to ensure that those who live in rural areas, the illiterate, and those who may not have access to mainstream or social media do not miss out.

“Thought also ought to be given to the timeframe for making an application under the scheme,” she said, adding the issues she had brought up were not exhaustive.

Another lawyer, Hazeeq Fadzli, called on the government to define what would constitute “serious side effects” that might arise from receiving the Covid-19 vaccine



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“For instance, would the term only cover side effects that are life-threatening or would it also include those resulting in incapacitation that reduces a person’s quality of life?” he said.

The amount of compensation, said Hazeeq, should also be discussed as to whether this would be the same across the board or vary on a case-to-case basis.

“If it’s the latter, perhaps a tribunal or committee should be formed to evaluate each and every application to ensure a fair amount of compensation is awarded.

“Subsequently, if the application is approved and compensation is awarded, would these individuals be barred from claiming any further compensation from the courts?” he said.

The limitation period to claim such compensation, he added, must also be deliberated.

Malaysian Society of Allergy and Immunology president Prof Dr Baharudin Abdullah said most vaccine-associated adverse reactions were not life-threatening.

“As with other vaccines, there will always be susceptible individuals who are allergic to the active ingredients following the administration, but the numbers are small.

“One of the considerations in undertaking any treatment is by profiling the ‘risk versus benefit’ comparison. When the benefit outweighs the risk, the treatment is justifiable,” he said.

For the special protection scheme, he said, as everyone must be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, its coverage must be extended to non-Malaysians as well.

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