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Frontliners Not Chosen Based On Covid-19 Exposure Risk: CITF

By Boo Su-Lyn | 03 March 2021

Defence and security personnel are listed as frontline workers because they can be mobilised at any time to “high risk areas”, says the Covid-19 Immunisation Task Force.



Khairy Jamaluddin, head of the Covid-19 Immunisation Task Force (CITF), speaks at a press conference on February 17, 2021. Picture from Twitter @RembauForever.

KUALA LUMPUR, March 3 — The 500,000 frontliners prioritised under the first phase of the national Covid-19 vaccination programme were selected regardless of their risk of coronavirus exposure, said the Covid-19 Immunisation Task Force (CITF).

CITF, which is chaired by Vaccine Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, said the government had issued guidelines to determine the list of frontliners to avoid queue jumping, amid complaints of politicians cutting the line for jobs ahead of health care workers.

“We would like to reiterate that frontliners listed under both Category 1 and Category 2 belong to the priority group of the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme, regardless of the level or degree of their interaction with potential Covid-19 patients,” CITF told *CodeBlue* in a statement.

“Whether they are serving in public or private settings, these groups are eligible to be vaccinated under the first phase of the immunisation programme.”

According to the government’s guidelines

(<https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2021/03/01/no-early-covid-19-jabs-for-politicians-family-officers-khairy/>), frontline workers are placed in two categories under the Covid-19 vaccination programme: the first category covers health care providers directly involved in health care and medical treatment, covering Ministry of Health and Defence Ministry facilities, as well as teaching hospitals, and private hospitals.

The second category comprises other health care professionals like private general practitioners (GPs) and private dentists; defence agencies; security and essential services staff; and elected representatives.

Category 2 of frontliners includes the police, Malaysian Armed Forces, General Operations Force, Malaysia Civil Defence Force, Prisons Department, Immigration Department, Fire and Rescue Department, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), Rela, as well as the Customs Department.

Covid-19 outbreaks have previously been reported in police lockups, prisons, and immigration detention centres, but none in military bases or among other security or defence staff. The army also assists the police in manning roadblocks during lockdowns. It is unknown how many deaths from Covid-19 have occurred among security or defence personnel; a few fatalities have been reported among police officers.

The United Kingdom (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-care-home-and-healthcare-settings-posters/covid-19-vaccination-first-phase-priority-groups>) does not list defence or security personnel, or politicians, in its

Covid-19 vaccination priority groups, prioritising instead care home staff and residents; followed by people aged 80 years and over and frontline health and social care workers; and next, all those aged 75 years and over.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/immunization/sage/covid/sage-prioritization-roadmap-covid19-vaccines.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=bf227443_2) recommends prioritising Covid-19 inoculation for health care workers and older adults at the first stage when vaccines are limited, listing essential workers outside the health and education sectors for vaccination only at the third stage with moderate vaccine availability.

The United States (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations.html>) prioritises health care personnel and long-term care facility residents for Covid-19 vaccination, followed by frontline essential workers (fire fighters, police officers, food and agricultural workers, and United States Postal Service workers, among others) and people aged 75 years and older. Defence and other security personnel, or politicians, are not listed as frontline essential workers.

CITF explained to *CodeBlue* that the General Operations Force, Malaysia Civil Defence Force and MMEA were included in the list of frontline workers “as there are requirements for them to be immediately mobilised at any point of time to any locations nationwide which would require them to work in high-risk areas”.

“The listing of Air Force, Navy, Rela, Bomba and Customs personnel is also established on the same basis as the services stated above. These services are part of the nation’s security services that could potentially put them at high risk of being exposed to the Covid-19 infection in their line of duty.”

Singapore (<https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/most-saf-regulars-full-time-national-servicemen-be-vaccinated-against-covid-19-mid-2021>) started inoculating its armed forces personnel on January 14, with its Ministry of Defence saying that the majority of servicemen in the Singapore Armed Forces are expected to be vaccinated by the middle of this year.

CITF said the Covid-19 Vaccine Supply Access Guarantee Committee (JKJAV) is also forming a sub-committee to look into requests and applications for new categories of people who want to be qualified as frontline workers.

The first phase of the national Covid-19 vaccination programme targeting half a million frontline workers is scheduled to run until April, after which people aged above 60 and those with underlying health conditions will be inoculated.

Covid-19 vaccine (<https://codeblue.galencentre.org/tag/covid-19-vaccine/>)

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