

Private Covid-19 vaccinations to complement, not compete



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There are no immediate provisions for private hospitals to buy and run their own vaccination programmes

by NUR HANANI AZMAN / pic by RAZAK GHAZALI

PRIVATE hospitals’ plans to offer Covid-19 vaccines are not to get in the way of the government’s programme, but to complement the country’s vaccination process.

Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia (APHM) president Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh said the government needs help as the three-stage immunisation programme is expected to only end in February next year, which is too long and “unacceptable”.

The idea, he said, is for those with means to get vaccinated at private hospitals, hence making the government list shorter, but not everyone looks at it from that angle.

“The approval for private vaccinations needs to be made soon so that private hospitals can start planning and place orders for the vaccines.

“With Saudi Arabia making Covid-19 vaccination compulsory for this year’s haj and umrah, the vaccines will be in high demand and we really need to speed up,” he told *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)*.

There are no immediate provisions for private hospitals to buy and run their own vaccination programmes.



Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar said it was a proposal which the government would consider “later”.

Nonetheless, rumours are already going around that vaccines provided by private hospitals would cost a fortune.

Dr Kuljit said it is difficult to estimate the price for the vaccine as it varies depending on the manufacturer and how soon the hospital wants the vaccines.

“Looking at other countries around the world that already allow private vaccinations, the price won’t be extremely high.

“But bear in mind that the delivery process will take some time, so the government must give us the approval soon instead of ‘later’,” he said.

He said APHM’s proposal, which had been submitted to Khairy, who is also the Coordinating Minister for the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (NIP), would not marginalise the less fortunate group.

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However, public health expert Prof Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman stressed that the global supply might not be enough and that is why Malaysians are getting the vaccine in stages.

“So, where are the private hospitals getting their supply from?” he questioned.

He also raised the possibility that pharmacies would hold back some stocks and sell at higher prices on demand.

“Then, we will have serious issues with accessibility and black market.

“We are all at risk, but the risk is not equal. The poor who live and work in poor conditions are more at risk than the rich.

“I propose an approach which is based on priority that somewhat minimises potential inequality,” he told *TMR*.

On Saturday, Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Datuk Ahmad Amzad Hashim said the government will have to monopolise vaccine purchase for now.

Ahmad Amzad added that the private sector may be allowed to purchase the Covid-19 vaccine once 80% of the population has been vaccinated.

Malaysian Medical Association president Prof Datuk Dr Subramaniam Muniandy said procurement and administration of vaccines by private healthcare should only start once all healthcare frontliners and vulnerable groups are vaccinated and when there is sufficient supply of vaccines.

He explained that currently, there is a global shortage due to the demand as most countries have begun inoculating their populations.

“It can complement government efforts in inoculating the population but only after high-risk groups are vaccinated under the Covid-19 NIP’s Phases 1 and 2, when there is sufficient supply of the vaccines.

“We also have a responsibility as a global citizen to not contribute to the current global shortage of vaccines, to ensure that poorer countries can also receive supply,” he told *TMR*.

At this stage, he said Malaysia will not know how much vaccinations at private healthcare facilities will cost as there is still a long way to go in the first two phases of NIP.

“Moreover, there are many manufacturers. Each will have their own price and terms,” he added.

Meanwhile, senior consultant paediatrician Datuk Dr Amar-Singh HSS said private healthcare could play a role in speeding up the vaccination process by lending a hand to the government instead of charging it.

“I am not in favour of selling the vaccine, but I think the Health Ministry (MoH) can use these private general practitioners to help deliver the vaccines faster.

“This is vital, especially for the first and second phases,” he told *TMR*.

Additionally, Dr Amar-Singh urged the government to look at the list of frontliners carefully and not to miss anyone.

“Besides police and nurses, there are those who work in supermarkets and all food delivery riders who are also frontliners,” he concluded.

Consultant Pediatrician at KPJ Damansara Specialist Hospital Dr Musa Mohd Nordin applauds APHM’s effort and describes it as the real and optimal public-private partnership (PPP).



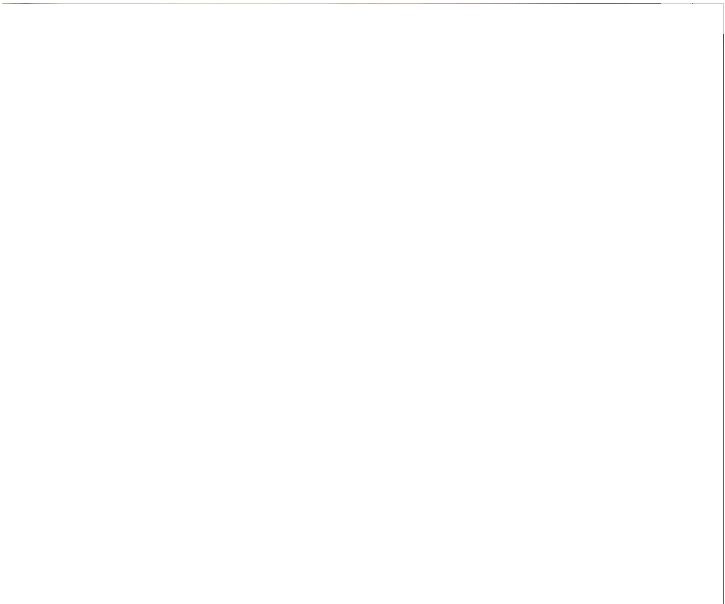
He said Covid-19 vaccines are available on the private market globally, for example, private hospitals in India charged up to 250 rupees (RM14) per shot.

“India has been doing in range 300,000 to 400,000 vaccines before PPP. Since some 20,000 private and 10,000 public hospitals administering the vaccine from March 1, the capacity with private participation goes up to two million per day.

“Meanwhile, in Malaysia, only 11,000 doses per day are achieved. It’s all about cooperation, not competition. It’s all about collaboration, not coercion. This is an opportunity for MoH and the Special Committee on Covid-19 Vaccine Supply Access Guarantee to become productive,” he told *TMR*.

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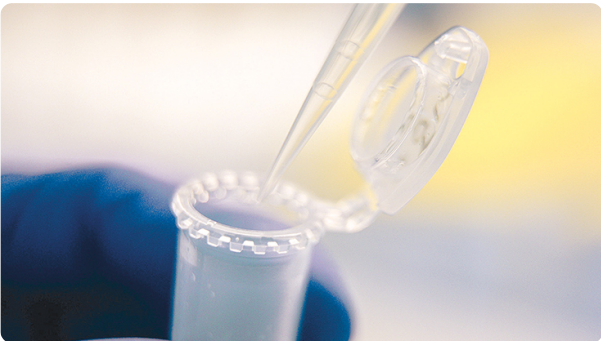
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