

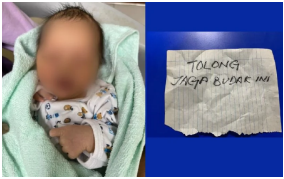
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NST Leader: AstraZeneca anxiety

April 9, 2021 @ 11:59pm



(FILES) In this file photo taken on March 31, 2021 Doses and a vial of AstraZeneca's vaccine against the coronavirus (Covid-19) lie prepared in a tray at a doctor's office in Deisenhofen, southern Germany, amid the ongoing pandemic. - AFP

IT appears the government has relented and will review the use of the Covid-19 vaccine produced by AstraZeneca in the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (NIP).

NIP Coordinating Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, in a Twitter post on Thursday, said the government would deliberate and decide if it would go ahead with using the vaccine in NIP's portfolio of vaccines.

Laudable, considering the disturbing findings by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) of a "possible link to very rare cases of unusual blood clots combined with low levels of blood platelets occurring within 2 weeks of vaccination".

Reviewing the safety aspects of the vaccine is warranted. There is growing uneasiness over reports of blood clotting among some recipients of the vaccine. And the knowledge that more than a dozen countries have suspended the use of this particular vaccine has only heightened the angst.

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VACCINE



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The latest country to take action is Canada, where those below the age of 55 will not be given the vaccine. Sweden, Latvia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovenia, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Ireland and Bulgaria are among countries that have suspended the use of the vaccine.

In Malaysia, fear over the vaccine's side effects has not been quelled by assurances from the health minister or other health bodies. There are already those who fear taking vaccines; with the AstraZeneca vaccine, the fear may be multiplied or taken as proof that being vaccinated against Covid-19 is dangerous.

Such fears, logical or not, contribute to vaccine hesitancy. It does not matter that the EMA has said the benefits outweigh the risks, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention have said there is no reason to change vaccination programmes.

The WHO, in fact, is still studying the latest data and expects a fresh assessment soon after its own vaccine safety advisory group meets, but it does not believe there will be a reason to change its advice that the benefits outweigh the risks. But how do the benefits outweigh the risks? If the risk is death, do we really want to subject ourselves and our family members to it?

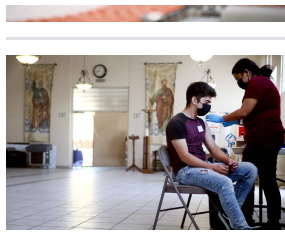
Continuing with the plan to use the vaccine is like leading lambs to slaughter, the only difference is that we would be aware of the possible danger, but are still going ahead. Fortunately, that may not happen now.

Reportedly, more than 20 million doses of AstraZeneca have been administered worldwide and only a few recipients display rare side effects. Still, we cannot isolate the gremlin as it can affect the entire NIP exercise and we may not be able to achieve herd immunity because of that.

Never mind that it may slow down our vaccination exercise. It is a minor setback and Khairy himself has said we have backup plans. Safety is the issue here, and safety of the people who will be vaccinated is paramount.

This Leader urges health authorities to keep the people in the loop on their next move and be transparent in their findings. As experts point out – keeping the people informed and absolute transparency can help counter vaccine reluctance and prevent the public from seeking other less reliable sources of information.

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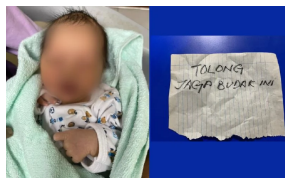


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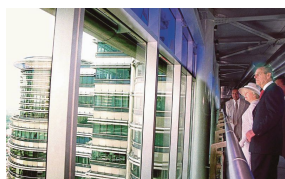
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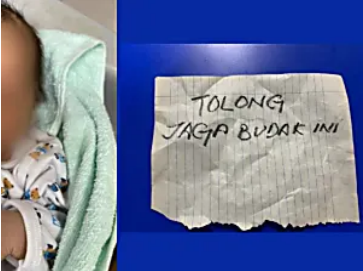
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