

Incentive for the hesitant



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Front of the line: A vaccine recipient entering the hall for inoculation on the opening day of the PPV at Dewan Jubli Perak Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah. — Bernama

PETALING JAYA: Relaxation of Covid-19 rules can be considered for those vaccinated as it may encourage hesitant individuals to get their Covid-19 jab, say health experts.

They, however, are of the opinion that such a move should only be done after the majority of the Malaysian population is fully vaccinated.

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However, she said that for now, individuals must still maintain the standard operating procedure even after being inoculated.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba recently said health experts had already given briefings on the proposed relaxed guidelines governing fully vaccinated individuals, which would be presented to the National Security Council.

Other countries have made moves to lift restrictions on fully vaccinated people.

Britain, for instance, has planned to ease most of its Covid-19 rules such as face masks and physical distancing come July 19 in what is dubbed as “Freedom Day”.

However, health experts in Malaysia say that a balance needs to be struck between incentivising people to get vaccinated and remaining cautious, especially in light of the Delta variant.

Dr Moy said SOP like wearing masks, maintaining hand hygiene as well as avoiding crowds and enclosed areas should still be maintained.

“However, some relaxation in these procedures can be considered if there is a gathering among fully vaccinated individuals.

“These gatherings of vaccinated individuals could be in larger groups, such as religious services, weddings, concerts and sporting events.

“In these gatherings, mask-wearing and hand hygiene should still be enforced,” she said.

She added that international and interstate travel could be considered for those fully vaccinated, though international travel would be subjected to approval by other countries.

Such easing of measures, Dr Moy stressed, should only be introduced when at least half of the population have been fully vaccinated.

(It has to be at least two weeks after receiving their second dose of Covid-19 vaccination before a person is considered fully vaccinated.)

“These relaxed measures may promote vaccination among those who are hesitant to be vaccinated.

“However, individuals who have yet to get their vaccines may feel discriminated against, if relaxed measures apply to others,” she pointed out.

She noted that while some other countries had relaxed restrictions as the proportion of fully vaccinated people increased, the emergence of the new

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“Singapore is in the process of drafting more relaxed measures for their fully vaccinated citizens.

“Countries like the United States and Israel have relaxed rules such as stopping enforcement of mask-wearing in public areas.

“However, Israel has now reinstated its mask-wearing rule as the Covid-19 situation there worsened,” Dr Moy added.

National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme coordinating minister Khairy Jamaluddin had also said the guidelines would be ready in August, with things looking up as Malaysia’s daily vaccine doses had hit the 300,000 mark.

However, he stressed that the authorities would have to be mindful of the danger posed by the new Delta variant.

On July 7, senior World Health Organisation official Mike Ryan warned countries against lifting their restrictions too quickly so as not to “lose the gains that (they) have made”.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Azmi Mohd Tamil said that while it would be good to loosen restrictions for those vaccinated, there were practical challenges to implementing it.

“Right now during the enhanced movement control order, even some vital hospital staff members were turned back at roadblocks.

“If that is already a problem, imagine a larger crowd of vaccinated individuals trying to get through roadblocks.

“A more innovative idea is required to implement such easing of restrictions, otherwise it won’t work,” he said.

Dr Azmi, however, said the main priority was still to get people vaccinated as quickly as possible, especially with the current Covid-19 situation in Malaysia.

On “dangled carrots” such as eased travel restrictions, he said Malaysians could ill-afford to be picky about which brand of vaccines would grant them travel access to certain countries in the future.

“Right now, we are talking about people’s lives.

“Only the ‘kiasu’ ones may be discouraged from taking certain vaccines, but the pragmatic ones know that the best vaccine is the one that we

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