

Vaccination campaign push pays off



By FATIMAH ZAINAL

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On track: (From right) Khairy and Works Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof visiting a Covid-19 vaccination centre set up at CIDB Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur, in this file photo. — LOW LAY PHON/The Star

PETALING JAYA: Despite vast inequality in the global Covid-19 vaccine distribution which slowed the delivery of doses to Malaysia in the initial months of its inoculation drive, Malaysia's mass immunisation rate is now among the world's fastest, says Khairy Jamaluddin.

As of Saturday, Malaysia, which has a population of 32 million, had given a total of 16,904,896 jabs since March.

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The National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme coordinating minister said its slow start was not due to issues of competency, ability or capacity, but boiled down to the disproportionate share of vaccine doses between wealthy nations and developing ones like Malaysia.

“If we look at the data now, Malaysia has one of the fastest vaccination rates in the world,” he said.

The mass immunisation campaign is now progressing apace as supplies have picked up this month following the increase in the delivery of doses ordered by the government such as the Pfizer-BioNTech, Sinovac and AstraZeneca vaccines.

“As I promised, the inoculation drive will pick up as soon as vaccine deliveries increase this month.

“The average vaccination rate so far is 357,064 doses per day compared to last month at 169,175 doses per day. This is an increase of 111%.

“To date, 46.7% of those who registered have received at least one dose.

“Based on the capacity of the 2,204 vaccine dispensing centres (PPV) that are currently in operation nationwide, we are able to administer more than 500,000 doses daily, a mark we crossed on July 22,” he said in a recent interview.

Khairy added that in the Asia-Pacific, Malaysia’s mass immunisation programme was doing relatively well compared to its neighbours with the exception of Singapore.

The country has now surpassed first world nations such as Australia and South Korea.

Malaysia is almost on par with Japan in terms of the number of population that has received at least the first dose but still behind rich, developed and vaccine-producing countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, countries in the European Union and the United States.

Khairy said the “preferential treatment” accorded to wealthy nations by vaccine manufacturers had created a gap between rich countries and developing ones, many of which were still struggling to secure enough supplies.

“It is not because we are a failed state or haprak (useless) but because of the vast discrepancy of vaccine distribution at the global level. “Countries like Canada and the United Kingdom bought enough vaccines for 500% of their population. It was also reported that the European Union has more than enough vaccines for its population.

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Responding to critics who questioned why Malaysia was seemingly late to join the Covax facility, a scheme designed by the World Health Organisation to deliver cheap doses to promote vaccine equality, Khairy said from the get-go, he was against putting all eggs in one basket.

“We ordered enough doses to cover 10% of the population from Covax. But so far, we have only received over 800,000 of the 6.4 million doses we have been hoping for.

“If we were to rely solely on Covax for our supply of vaccines, we would be in serious trouble. This is why we have to spread out the vaccine procurement strategy,” he said.

Far from resting on the laurels of the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme, Khairy said the government was now striving to achieve the key performance indicator (KPI) given by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

The KPI set for August, September and October includes fully vaccinating all of the adult population by October or November, ahead of the government’s initial goal of December.

“When full vaccination reaches 40% of the population, cases will hopefully decrease.

“I hope that by Aug 31, we will reach this threshold and see a reduced number of hospitalisations and deaths,” he said, adding that the current full vaccination rate is 16%.

The KPI includes ensuring that all of the adult population in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur receive at least one dose by Aug 1 under Operation Surge Capacity. To reach this target, 1.3 million people must be inoculated between July 26 and Aug 1.

“We are ready in terms of supply and capacity,” said Khairy.

Also according to the KPI, by the end of August, all of the adult population in Sarawak should have received at least one dose while almost all states reach 50% vaccination during the same period.

Khairy said in September, the goal was set for all states to reach a 70% vaccination rate, adding that the KPI also aimed to increase vaccination capacity to 500,000 per day.

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Concurrently, the Public-Private Partnership Industrial Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (Pikas) involving workers in key sectors is also ongoing.

Up to July 21, 123 PPV Industry Programmes had commenced.

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