

Give vaccine priority to teachers to protect students

KUALA LUMPUR: Teachers should also be given priority as recipients of COVID-19 vaccine as they spend the most time with students when the school starts.

Education expert Prof Dr Ismi Arif Ismail said the earlier announcement was that children and teenagers aged 18 and below would not be given the COVID-19 vaccine for the time being as frontliners and senior citizens would be given priority due their risk in getting infected.

"So to ensure that children are also protected from the pandemic, teachers need to be given the vaccine as protection for others.

"Besides, teachers and students will be spending considerable time together during school sessions so it is only appropriate for teachers to be protected to make students feel safe with them," he told Bernama.

Apart from that, he stressed, they (teachers and students) must continue to adhere to the standard operating procedures (SOP) set such as practising physical distancing, wearing face masks and hand washing as well as avoiding gathering to combat the pandemic.

"I would like to remind that under any circumstances, the SOP should continue to be complied with and should not be taken lightly even if the vaccine is now available. We should have to continue complying with the SOP to prevent any waves of breakout," he said.

Indirectly, Ismi Arif, who is also the director of the Institute of Social Sciences

Studies (IPSAS), Putra Infoport, Universiti Putra Malaysia, said the situation would remove the fear of parents to send their children to school.

"... and parents should also be assured that the school has taken safety measures before children are allowed to go to school," he said.

On Tuesday, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) executive director, Henrietta Fore recommended that teachers be given priority to obtain the COVID-19 vaccine, after frontliners and high-risk groups.

She was reported as saying in New York that the move would ensure efforts for children around the world to continue their learning.

In sharing the same view, National Parent-Teacher Association (PIBGN) Consultative Council president, Associate Prof Datuk Mohamad Ali Hasan thinks the readiness to implement the teaching and learning process (PdP) virtually or online is still not ideal.

Apart from that, he said, teachers are also more comfortable holding conventional PdP sessions, face to face with students.

"There are various problems and obstacles for online PdP sessions, including device problems, poor internet connection and not all students have adequate facilities, especially in rural areas.

"In fact, there are also students who are not serious in following online learning while teachers could not fully gauge the extent of

their students' understanding in the subject they teach," he said.

In fact, Mohamad Ali also described educators as the frontline group because they are fighting for the country's education to regain its momentum.

"Their contribution and role is huge because education is an important sector that shapes the future of the country," he said.

He suggested that teachers, especially those with health problems, working in rural areas or those in overcrowded areas, be the priority group as recipient of the vaccine.

Meanwhile, the National Union of Teaching Professions Malaysia (NUTP) secretary-general Harry Tan Huat Hock felt that the vaccination will provide protection to teachers and enable the PdP session to commence as soon as possible.

"We found that online home learning sessions have many disadvantages such as insufficient devices or gadgets, internet network weaknesses, disciplinary problems and student attendance which cause online PdP sessions to be disrupted.

"The measure will also ensure students do not drop out and school sessions can be reopened soon," he said in a statement.

In this regard, he said, NUTP is requesting special consideration from the government and the Ministry of Health (MOH) for educators to give priority in receiving COVID-19 vaccine in order to improve and strengthen the national education system.

-Bernama