

# Include workers from other sectors in NIP priority list too, say experts

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The government's decision to put manufacturing and industrial workers, especially in Penang and Selangor, in the priority list under the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (NIP) is hailed as sensible, given their contributions to the economy.

However, experts hoped the government could also include, as economic frontliners under the NIP, workers from other sectors who had face-to-face interactions.

This would not only reduce the number of clusters linked to workplaces, but also spur the economy.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said people working in the hospitality industry and in areas frequented by the public should also get early vaccination.

"By vaccinating workers, we also assure them that there are still jobs for them (being economic



*Datuk  
Shamsuddin  
Bardan*



*Professor Dr  
Yeah Kim  
Leng*

frontliners).

"We can restore people's confidence (that it is safe to take part in tourism activities) and encourage them to spend and spur the economy.

Shamsuddin said: "We need to ensure the vaccination programme is done quickly to revive the economy, while making sure that foreign workers are inoculated."

Sunway University Business School economics Professor Dr Yeah Kim Leng said he hoped the

government would consider including frontline workers and office staff in sectors that had face-to-face interactions with other people.

"The re-prioritisation of the vaccination rollout to focus on manufacturing, industrial and commercial activities could reduce the number of workplace clusters more quickly.

"This re-prioritisation should be pursued along with the important goal of achieving herd immunity by bringing forward the completion of the vaccination programme this year."

Shamsuddin and Yeah were asked to comment on the statement by Senior International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali that manufacturing and industrial workers, especially in Penang and Selangor, would be given priority to get vaccinated.

Azmin had described the two states as "industrial zones" with vibrant economic activities con-

tributing to the economy.

Yeah, nevertheless, commended the government's decision to give priority to groups categorised as economic frontliners in the NIP.

"The prioritisation of vaccination for manufacturing and industrial workers is appropriate given the importance of manufacturing in sustaining Malaysia's economic recovery and the relatively high number of workplace clusters.

"The focus on Selangor and Penang is not surprising given that together with Johor, the three states accounted for 56 per cent of the country's manufacturing output in 2019."

Bank Islam chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said that with vaccination, the manufacturing and industrial workers could be allowed to return to work in full force.

"This will improve the production capacity of manufacturing industries at a time when exter-

nal demand looks promising."

The main challenge, he said, was the implementation of the NIP, particularly people's concerns about vaccine side-effects.

Afzanizam said: "Therefore, the main worry is the public's perception of the vaccination programme.

"The public's lack of confidence could compromise the timeline for the country achieving herd immunity.

"So there must be transparent communication (on vaccination) to garner a total buy-in from the masses."

Health expert Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman said the government's decision could stem worksite clusters.

The Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist and biostatistician said those to be screened after being identified as close contacts, or close contacts who turned out negative, should be advised to get vaccinated.