

# '300,000 JABS DAILY TO REACH HERD IMMUNITY'

Epidemiologist says current goal of 150,000 to 200,000 vaccinations a day is not enough

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**M**ALAYSIA needs to vaccinate between 300,000 and 500,000 people a day to achieve herd immunity by year end.

Epidemiologist Professor Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud of Universiti Malaya said there was a need to boost vaccination as the number of sporadic cases had increased and the growing suspicion that the infectious period for Covid-19 had reached 21 days.

"Having a half-baked lockdown with lots of movement and contact between people means sporadic cases will continue to spread. This measure is temporary, and the cases will rise again after a two- or three-month lockdown. A more permanent solution is to push vaccination as

hard and as quickly as possible to stop the virus' transmission by achieving herd immunity."

He said the target should be revised to between 300,000 and 500,000 jabs a day.

He added that the government's goal of administering 150,000 jabs a day this month and increasing it to 200,000 the following month was not enough.

"The target should be 300,000 jabs per day to vaccinate 25 million people by year end.

"This is because two jabs per person, which means 50 million jabs, need to be administered.

"That will take us roughly six months of continuous vaccination at 300,000 jabs per day," the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry's Independent Covid-19 Vaccination Advisory Committee head told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

Dr Awang Bulgiba said this must be done at once before new variants took root in the community. Otherwise, herd immunity would be harder to achieve.

"If more people have even par-



A frontline vaccinating an elderly man at Setia City Convention Centre's vaccination centre in Shah Alam yesterday. PIC BY FAIZ ANUAR

tial immunity against Covid-19, then the probability of virus transmission and its presence in the community will be reduced."

Once the 80 per cent target was reached, he said, children could undergo vaccination and this would lead to herd immunity, barring any new variant.

"We may start to see a sustained reduction in the sporadic infections once 50 per cent of the population is vaccinated, as that would greatly reduce transmission."

He said that at this point, mass testing was too exhaustive and could not cover

the population fast enough.

He said negative results without immediate vaccination was futile as sporadic transmissions made up 60 to 80 per cent of the cases now.

Dr Awang Bulgiba, who is also



Professor Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud

the ministry's Covid-19 Epidemiological Analysis and Strategies Task Force chairman said that efforts by Sarawak and the Federal Territories to register and visit the community to vaccinate people were timely.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said the two-week Movement Control Order was insufficient as the number of daily new cases could be two or three times the reported figure due to the magnitude of sporadic infections and the high number of clusters that were diminishing overstretched testing and tracing resources.

"We need at least a month of MCO to carry out testing, tracing and surveillance, and track the significant changes."

He said the success of this would also depend on the precision of the public health intervention strategies.

He added that aggressive find-test-trace-isolate-support measures must be the main thrust.

"Overall, there must be a transparent and real, cohesive plan.

"They (the relevant agencies) need to go back to the drawing board and come up with a detailed analysis of statistics and a good community surveillance system."

Epidemiologist Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman of Universiti Putra Malaysia said the high number of sporadic cases was likely due to cases from clusters that were not contained or tackled.

These, she said, spread through poor SOP compliance and the emergence of hardier variants.

"The best way to address the problem is to vaccinate essential workers, such as delivery riders, factory workers and others who have to be present to work physically or in the field despite the lockdown."

PAGE 1: A frontline checking in on people waiting to get their Covid-19 vaccine jabs at a vaccination centre at Axiata Arena in Bukit Jalil yesterday.