

Experts urge govt to consider using Sinovac for 3 to 17 age group

KUALA LUMPUR: Health experts are all for the country's health regulatory body to study the use of Sinovac Covid-19 vaccine for children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 17.

This follows reports that China has granted approval for the vaccine, developed by Beijing-based Sinovac Biotech Ltd, to be used for emergency purposes on its people within the age group, as well as taking into consideration the Covid-19 situation in Malaysia, which still registers four-digit daily new infections.

Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan said Malaysia should not wait any further as the number of Covid-19 cases involving children were increasing.

"The pandemic is still raging and would reach a million cases soon at the present rate of in-

fections. You may not be able to live without Covid-19 vaccines. Take it. Give it. Promote it. Make it mandatory as it affects the health of the nation," said the former Malaysian Medical Association president.

Furthermore, he said, the safety aspect of the Sinovac vaccine had been approved and recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

He cited reports where WHO had recently approved the use of Sinovac vaccine for emergency use and that sources from the global health body found that the vaccine prevented

symptomatic diseases in 51 per cent of those vaccinated, as well as severe symptoms and hospitalisation in 100 per cent of samples.

He also cited a study in the city of Serrana in the southeastern

Brazilian state of Sao Paulo with a population of 45,000 that saw a 95 per cent drop in Covid-19-related fatalities after the authorities claimed to have vaccinated almost all of its adults with Sinovac.

"So, why wait any further? Even if it does not prevent the disease, it will certainly protect, to some extent, from the severity of the disease. It may be a life and death choice."

Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman concurred with Dr Tharmaseelan, saying that the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) should look into the use of Sinovac vaccines for those in the 3 to 17 age group.

"At this time of crisis, the priority is not only to reduce the number of infected persons or mortality, but also to protect

all individuals from the infection.

"If the available data in China has supported the vaccine to be used for the respective age groups, I would recommend it to be studied by the NPRA, too, and subsequently to be offered to the public as well.

"Even though the number of those infected or deaths from the younger age groups are not prominent as those in the older group, these groups potentially serve as a source of transmission as most of them usually become healthy carriers or could be people

with the milder symptoms," said the Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiology and biostatistics expert.

Dr Malina said such a move was a step towards greater coverage for immunity in the community

so that the educational sector could be resumed as soon as possible.

It was reported that Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba had said the government was expected to announce on Wednesday its decision on the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 Comirnaty vaccine in young people aged between 12 and 15.

The decision, said Dr Adham, would be made at the Special Committee for Ensuring Access to Covid-19 Vaccine Supply (JK-JAV) meeting.

The announcement by Dr Adham came before reports that China had approved Sinovac for emergency use for people aged between 3 and 17.

Sinovac Biotech chairman Yin Weidong had told China's state TV on June 4 that the inoculation involving the younger groups hinged on when the health authorities in China would come out with its vaccination strategies. **By Adib Povera**



Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan



Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman