

We're getting there

Malaysia's aggressive push on vaccination will lead to a drop in Covid-19 infections once an estimated 40% of the population are given their jabs. In saying this, health experts also caution that the daily caseload should not be seen in absolute numbers but in terms of how severely patients are affected. > See report on page 3 by ASHLEY TANG

Why high job rate matters

Experts: Cases will decline when more people are fully inoculated

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia will start seeing a decline in Covid-19 cases when at least 40% of the population is vaccinated, say health experts.

For the past week, the number of infections has been hovering between 5,000 and 6,000 cases daily.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman projected that about 40% of the people have to be fully vaccinated with two full doses before a reduction in cases is seen.

"At the current vaccination rate, this means we need at least 30% more of the population to be vaccinated," she said.

As of Friday, a total of 4,227,554 doses have been administered in the country of which 2,929,736 people have been given their first dose while 1,297,818 have received two doses.

A total of 13,757,093 people have registered for the vaccination programme so far.

In order to drive down cases, Dr Malina believed that the infectivity rate (R0) below 0.5 in the country would also help.

Currently, R0 nationwide stands at 0.90 with Labuan recording the highest rate at 1.14.

Negri Sembilan (1.05), Sabah (1.08), Kuala Lumpur (1.0), Sarawak (0.99), Johor (0.97), Selangor (0.96), Perak (0.93), Melaka (0.93) and Pahang (0.91) are recording an R0 above the national average. Dr Malina was also of the view that the current active cases of almost 80,000 should be reduced to at least 14,000 for the lockdown to be lifted.

"The current total lockdown, in my opinion, is only a partial lockdown. This is because we have more than one million people out there still present in their workplace," she added.

She suggested for the implementation of a "hybrid approach" in which organisations with at least 60% to 80% of its employees vaccinated should be allowed to function normally according to its capacity together with the appropriate standard operating procedure.

At present, she noted that relying on the SOP or avoiding mass gatherings may no longer be suitable as cases continue to occur especially in the workplace.

"As soon as the health sector is no longer at a critical stage, I think we can start this hybrid approach," she said.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin



Getting ready: Mines International Exhibition and Convention Centre (MIECC) PPV team making the final arrangements before the opening of the centre in Seri Kembangan. — SAMUEL ONG/The Star



10,000 cases reported daily but all are Category 1 rather than 100 new cases daily but all are Category 5," he said.

He noted that data has shown that in countries where more than 50% of the population have been fully vaccinated with two doses, the drop is seen not in the number of cases but rather in the number of deaths and ICU admissions.

"This is because the 50% would have covered the most vulnerable groups," he said.

Some signs of a return to normalcy have been seen in countries with high vaccination rates.

In the United Kingdom, depending on the locality, holiday accommodations, cinemas, museums and galleries are allowed to reopen and wedding receptions and funeral wakes can take place.

Outdoor events including concerts and sports fixtures in front of an audience can also resume in Wales.

The G7 summit – the first in-person diplomatic meeting since the pandemic – is taking place at St Ives, Cornwall, southwest Britain, with the leaders attending seen not wearing face masks.

More than half of the citizens in the United Kingdom have been vaccinated and more than three quarters have already received at least one dose.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that fully vaccinated people are allowed to resume their activities without the need to wear a face mask or to physically distance except when it is required by state laws or local business and workplace.

Omar believed it is good if around 50% to 60% of the population is inoculated with the first dose and about 30% with two doses.

"With this, we can have around 70% to 80% vaccinated before year end, and before there are more virus mutations, especially in areas with high burden of cases such as the Klang Valley and in the high risk of transmission population: factory workers and school community," he said.

Some health experts, he noted, would also be comfortable with an R0 of less than 0.5.

But due to the problems in testing rates as well as the number of positive cases, he was not too confident on this.

"We do not know what is the coverage of contact tracing right now either," he added.

International Islamic University of Malaysia public health specialist Asst Prof Dr Mohammad Farhan Rusli said the number of daily Covid-19 cases would still be relatively high until the country reaches herd immunity.

"Now when we see the daily cases, we must move away from looking at absolute numbers and see the granular data. Important parameters are how many are Category 3 to 5 patients? How many are in the ICU and how many deaths?"

"It is safer for us to know that there are

Coming to you: People taking turns getting vaccinated in a mobile vaccination truck at Dewan Perumahan Awam Desa Rejang in Kuala Lumpur. The government deployed vaccination trucks to areas where people might have difficulty getting to immunisation centres through the MYMedic@Wilayah Vaccine Mobile Truck pioneer project. — GLENN GUAN/The Star