

Use other metrics to determine NRP timeline, urges expert

KUALA LUMPUR: Public health experts have recommended the government to use other metrics, such as positivity rate and the number of active cases, to determine the timeline for the National Recovery Plan (NRP).

Manipal University College Malaysia Community and Occupational Medicine Professor Dr G. Jayakumar described the decision to progress to its Phase Two when the daily new cases dip below the 4,000 mark as “a premature step”.

The World Health Organisation, he said, advocated for countries to maintain a positivity rate of below five per cent for at least

two weeks before easing restrictions.

“We need to factor in the number of people being tested daily in each state. A high positivity rate suggests the need for more testing, which is why it is not a good idea to relax Covid-19 restrictions. Regions with outbreaks need to do more testing. We should consider reimposing a lockdown in regions that record more than 50 new daily cases per 100,000 residents for seven consecutive days,” he told the *New Straits Times*.

Dr Jayakumar said the government must be mindful of the new variants of concern (VOC) before

relaxing Covid-19 restrictions.

On the government’s aim to vaccinate 60 per cent of the population by October, Dr Jayakumar said several population groups undergo vaccination before it could meet the target.

“There are high-risk populations, like the elderly, prison inmates, old folk homes and migrant workers, that have yet to be vaccinated.

“The availability of vaccines is also a cause for concern.”

He urged the government to inoculate those aged 12 and above.

The Health Ministry must rope in general practitioners and occupational physicians to ramp up

the vaccination drive and combat vaccine hesitancy, he said.

“The NRP should prioritise high-risk groups in the economic sector for vaccination before covering other groups. This is crucial since recent data has indicated a spike in workplace clusters, with the manufacturing sector being the biggest contributor and migrant workers forming a large chunk of these cases,” he said.

Universiti Malaya Occupational and Public Health Expert Professor Dr Victor Hoe said the government must study the trend of new cases, positivity and infectivity rates of the last seven days besides monitoring the VOCs be-

fore entering Phase Two.

On achieving the vaccination target, he said, it would depend on the supply of vaccines.

Epidemiologist Professor Dr Malina Osman believed Malaysia could vaccinate 60 per cent of its population by October if it could vaccinate 200,000 people daily.

The Universiti Putra Malaysia associate professor said essential and non-essential service sector employees must have equal priority for vaccination.

For the government to move into Phase Two of the NRP, she said, it could do so if the current 70,000 active cases dropped below 20,000.