

Get boosted to allay fears, say medical experts

By **MARTIN CARVALHO**
and **FATIMAH ZAINAL**
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Getting the booster shots is even more crucial to protecting against severe infection in light of the Covid-19 tsunami in China and the expected influx of Chinese tourists, says Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist Associate Prof Dr Malina Osman.

“After six months, the antibodies induced by vaccines will usually wane.

“The booster dose is needed to make sure the antibody level is always at the protective level for the person and this is important to prevent severe infection,” she said when contacted yesterday.

Those who have yet to get their Covid-19 booster shots should do so, she said, adding that the number of Malaysians who have taken their booster shots is still very low.

She said this is due to complacency, fear of side effects and a lack of awareness that bookings for their second booster shots can be made through their MySejahtera app.

“Most are not aware that they have to arrange for the appointments themselves rather than wait for an appointment through MySejahtera.

“Also, some have yet to take their booster shots as they still believe in certain myths or inaccurate information,” she said.

Dr Malina said the Health Ministry should work with other ministries, including non-governmental organisations, on the importance of getting vaccinated and boosted.

On Monday, Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa urged those who received their first booster shot more than six months ago to get a second dose without waiting for the bivalent vaccine to be available.

Citing existing data, she said the monovalent Covid-19 vaccines offer effective protection in preventing serious symptoms and fatalities.

The minister lamented that only 49.8% of Malaysians had received their first booster dose, and only 1.9% their second booster shot.

Universiti Malaya epidemiology



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and public health expert Prof Dr Sanjay Rampal said it is advisable for those in the high-risk group to get their booster shots.

“I would recommend those who are at high risk, such as those older than 60 and those with complicated chronic diseases, to get boosted.

“They can decide when to get boosted based on their risk tolerance thresholds.

“If you want to be as safe as pos-

sible as soon as possible, then get boosted immediately,” he said.

However, he noted that the public may be overreacting to fears over a spike in Covid-19 cases here in light of what is happening in China.

“While it’s good to be proactive, we must learn to manage our fear of the unknown and unwanted effects of this pandemic.

“Our society may also suffer from

a post-pandemic trauma stress disorder that tends to exaggerate our responses to new waves of Covid-19 infections,” he said.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah said the reason behind the low take-up rate for the boosters is due to concerns over the vaccine’s side effects and that research on the vaccine is relatively new.

“The boosters are also taken voluntarily, and so it could be a reason many have opted not to get the jabs.

“There are also those who are worried about the side effects,” he added.

He added that people are also concerned about the studies done on these vaccines, which are relatively new as Covid-19 vaccines only started being administered in December 2020.

Apart from getting the booster shots, he said the public should also continue to practise safe measures to prevent a possible surge in cases here owing to the developing situation in China.