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# 5% of vaccine stocks to be set aside for those involved in critical work

Panel, whose proposals have been accepted by Govt, also recommends prioritising jabs for public health reasons

**Lim Min Zhang**

About 5 per cent of available vaccine stocks at any point in time should be set aside for people working in areas critical to Singapore's functioning, said a top-level committee on vaccines yesterday.

Examples include those involved in ensuring the country's water and utilities and other "nationally essential services" are not disrupted.

This was among the key recommendations made by the expert committee on Covid-19 vaccination, which was tasked by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in October to devise a vaccine strategy for Singapore.

MOH yesterday said the Government has accepted the committee's recommendations in full, adding that Singapore's vaccination exercise will begin on Wednesday for workers at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases.

The committee said those involved in critical work should be protected from Covid-19 for "greater societal benefits", although identifying these groups was beyond the remit of the committee and will be left to the Government.

Other groups are being prioritised for vaccination for reasons of public health, and they include the elderly – especially those aged 70 and above who are at greater risk of worse health outcomes if they contract the virus – as well as healthcare workers and those working on the front line of the national Covid-19 response.

In recommending such workers to be prioritised, the committee said there is a duty to protect those who place themselves at higher risk of infection in the course of caring for the population.

Other recommendations by the committee include vaccinating everyone in Singapore who is medically eligible as more vaccines become available, and continuing to practise safe management measures until more people are vaccinated and more data on vaccines'

ability to prevent infections becomes available.

In its report to the Government, the committee said that while public health measures have been shown to be effective in containing outbreaks, the "fundamental challenge" is that the vast majority of people here and in the world do not have any immunity to the virus.

"The development and availability of effective Covid-19 vaccines is a critically important milestone, providing the means to fundamentally contain the pandemic, diminish its impact in terms of morbidity and deaths from infection, and eventually allow societies to return to normalcy," the report added.

The ultimate goal of its vaccination strategy against Covid-19, it said, is to achieve as high a level of population coverage as possible.

The committee noted that Singapore currently has a low rate of transmission, but the threat of an outbreak persists as the global pandemic intensifies and the country resumes more activities.

The Republic remains vulnerable to the disease and its spread, with the country's high population density and significant proportion of older people, said the report, adding that there is great value in vaccinating the population widely to pre-emptively protect against the risk of Covid-19.

While the Health Sciences Authority's clinical assessment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine found it to have a high efficacy of 95 per cent, with no significant safety concerns detected so far, continued monitoring for long-term efficacy of the vaccine will be needed to determine the duration of protection, as well as for rare and serious adverse effects, the report said.

As more vaccines become available, the committee will make further recommendations on other groups to be prioritised, such as those who live or work in settings where there is potential for rapid transmission and large outbreaks.

mzlim@sph.com.sg

## Key recommendations

Here are the key recommendations submitted to the Government by the Expert Committee on Covid-19 Vaccination:

- That the groups to be prioritised for vaccination should be people at high risk of being infected, such as healthcare and front-line workers; and people most vulnerable to severe disease and complications if they fall ill with Covid-19, who include the elderly and people with multiple vascular illnesses (affecting the circulatory system).
- That everyone living in Singapore, including citizens, permanent residents and long-term pass holders who are medically eligible should be vaccinated as vaccines become more widely available.
- That around 5 per cent of available vaccine stocks should be set aside at any point in time for groups of people who are critically important to the functioning of Singapore, such as those who ensure supplies of water and utilities are not disrupted.
- That ongoing measures such as safe distancing, mask wearing and good hand hygiene should still be practised until more people are vaccinated and more data on the vaccines' ability to prevent infections becomes available.

## The committee on vaccines

### Chairman:

**Associate Professor Benjamin Ong**, senior adviser to the director of medical services at the Ministry of Health (MOH).

### Members:

- **Dr Cheong Wei Yang**, deputy secretary (special projects) at MOH;
- **Associate Professor Chong Chia Yin**, senior consultant, Infectious Disease Service at KK Women's and Children's Hospital;
- **Professor Nicholas Gascoigne** from the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore;
- **Associate Professor Lim Poh Lian**, director of the High Level Isolation Unit and senior consultant at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID);
- **Associate Professor David Lye**, director of the Infectious Diseases Research and Training Office at NCID;
- **Associate Professor Helen Oh**, senior consultant at the Department of Infectious Diseases at Changi General Hospital;
- **Dr Lisa Ooi**, vice-president for healthcare and wellness at the Economic Development Board;
- **Dr Anuradha Poonepalli**, regulatory consultant, Therapeutic Products Branch, Health Products Regulation Group at the Health Sciences Authority;
- **Associate Professor Ren Ee Chee**, principal investigator at the Singapore Immunology Network;
- **Professor Laurent Renia**, executive director and senior principal investigator at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research Infectious Diseases Laboratories;
- **Professor Benjamin Seet**, deputy group chief executive for education and research at the National Healthcare Group;
- **Dr Danny Soon**, chief executive for the Consortium for Clinical Research and Innovation Singapore;
- **Professor Tan Chorh Chuan**, MOH's chief health scientist.