

COVID-19 Vaccination and Monsoon Season

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It is of no doubt that our country's COVID-19 vaccination exercise has, since July 2021, been extraordinary and commendable. To date, close to 40 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered with more than 17 million people having already received 2 doses. The population of Klang Valley, in particular, has currently received the highest number of doses in tandem with the primary goal of Operation Surge.

While the previous emphasis was to intensify the vaccination exercise in states with the highest rates of infection and ICU utilization, it should now be shifted to neutralizing the looming dangers of monsoon season faced by the flood-prone states.



In about a month from now, many areas in Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and Johor are expected to be hit by floods, and potentially thousands of victims would be placed at the designated evacuation centers throughout the entire course of the monsoon season. As these evacuation centers typically place many evacuees in the same space at the same time and many evacuees would not be able to strictly observe the SOPs all the time, the risk of COVID-19 transmission is therefore higher at these centers. On top of that, the newly discovered fact that COVID-19 is also airborne will definitely amplify the said risk.

It must also be stressed that the per capita hospital beds (ICU included), medical specialists, ventilators, and oxygenators are lower in these states in contrast to Klang Valley. Any delays in the vaccination exercise will consequently risk overwhelming the hospitals there and create another healthcare crisis as the one we saw in Klang Valley not long ago.

Hence, it is important to get at least 80% of the adult populations in these states receive their second dose by mid-October, for it takes 2 to 3 weeks after the second dose to attain the desired level of immunity. Alternatively, we can also use single-dose vaccines like CanSino and Johnson & Johnson to make the exercise more efficient. Also, the officials in these states can learn from and replicate the efforts taken by the Sarawak government in their vaccination campaign.

We certainly have no time to be wasted. While the pace in Terengganu looks good so far, Kelantan and Pahang still have a lot to catch up. Let us hope that everything goes well and no unforeseen obstacle gets in our way.

