

HEAL

BROUGHT TO YOU BY LIFE & TIMES



Protection against severe Covid-19 outcomes like hospitalisation and death is the best measure of how effective a vaccine is.

FILE PICTURE

New Straits Times (14/6/2022) page 18

The case for vaccination

Covid-19 vaccine effectiveness relates to the ability of vaccines to prevent hospitalisation and death, writes **Meera Murugesan**

FAST FACTS

- 65.4 per cent of the world's population has received at least one dose of the vaccine
- 11.62 billion doses have been administered globally
- 10.52 million doses are being administered each day
- 15.8 per cent of people in low-income countries have received one dose

Source: Our World in Data — ourworldindata.org

C OVID-19 vaccination has been one of the most talked-about subjects in the past year. In Malaysia, almost 82 per cent of the population has received two doses of the vaccine.

Many have come to accept vaccination as the most effective means to fight the pandemic and return to normalcy. Current data supports this view.

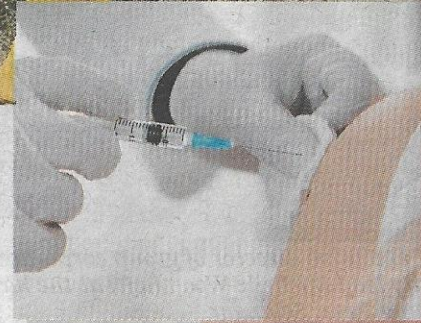
In the past two years, we have witnessed the devastation caused by the pandemic, which has claimed millions of lives and caused enormous economic and social destruction, says Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Tropical Medicine and Public Health (TROPMED) Network secretary-general Dr Pratap Singhavanon.

ASTRAZENECA'S Covid-19 vaccine and mRNA Covid-19 vaccines, the world's most-used vaccines, provide equivalent protection against hospitalisation and death following two doses, a new expert review of data from 79 real-world studies reveals.

The newly reviewed data shows that both AstraZeneca, which is one of the available viral vector vaccines, and mRNA Covid-19 vaccines offer equivalent protection against hospitalisation (91.3 per cent and 92.5 per cent respectively) and death (91.4 per cent and 93.3 per cent respectively) regardless of age, with no statistical difference.

While initial antibody response levels can vary across vaccines, their ability to prevent being hospitalised or dying from Covid-19 is equivalent.

The data, reviewed by infectious disease experts from across Asia, comes from Viewhub, an interactive platform for visualising global data on vaccine use and impact developed by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the



Vaccination is the best option to battle the pandemic. PICTURE: CREATED BY FREEPIK — WWW.FREEPIK.COM

TO BOOST OR NOT?

Booster shots also play a role in providing a crucial extra layer of protection against Covid-19.

AstraZeneca Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Asia area medical director Dr Bruce Mungall says vaccines have and continue to provide very high efficacy against severe Covid-19 outcomes. But vaccine effectiveness against the Omicron variant is lower than the Delta.

"This is largely what is driving the large number of Omicron cases around the world. Fortunately, the majority of these infections are much milder compared with Delta," says Dr Mungall.

But the most important thing is keeping people out of hospitals and preventing them from dying, he adds, and vaccines continue to do a very good job in that aspect, even with Omicron.

Covid-19 has tested global health systems beyond their limits. PICTURE:

CREATED BY STARLINE — WWW.FREEPIK.COM

MALAYSIA (Up to May 6)

- Total doses administered: 70,345,153
- Total number of those with at least one dose: 27,775,478
- Total number of people with two doses: 26,744,537
- Total number of people with booster shots: 16,038,512
- 81.9 per cent of the population has received two doses and 49.1 per cent has been given booster shots

Source: covidnow.moh.gov.my

Speaking during a media roundtable on "Understanding Covid-19 Vaccine Effectiveness", Dr Pratap, a former dean of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine at Mahidol University, Thailand, says Covid-19 has tested global health systems beyond their limits and remains an ever-changing challenge.

But one thing is clear, he says. Vaccinations have and continue to be the best protection against the most serious consequences of Covid-19, which are hospitalisation and death.

"The most effective way to minimise the impact of Covid-19 on lives and livelihoods is through comprehensive vaccination programmes," says Dr Pratap.

International Vaccine Access Centre.

NEED FOR VACCINATION

Dr Pratap explains that how well a vaccine performs in terms of preventing the recipient from developing severe Covid-19, leading to hospitalisation or even death, is an accurate measure of its effectiveness.

Philippine College of Physicians secretary Dr Rontgene Solante agrees with this view.

He says all vaccines are able to generate good antibody responses but that alone is not an indication of how effective they are. Antibody profiles are not effective predictors of vaccine effectiveness against severe disease.

Protection against severe Covid-19 effects like hospitalisation and death is the best measure of how effective a vaccine is.

Dr Solante says antibodies also wane over time after vaccination, but this doesn't mean that our protection against severe infection is diminished.

"Even with waning antibody levels, there is still good protection against severe infection, hospitalisation and death from Covid-19," he says.

While antibodies may drop after the initial flood when one first gets the vaccine, the protection remains.



But what's clear, particularly with data from the United Kingdom, is that two doses are probably not enough to prevent the majority of hospitalisation or deaths with the Omicron variant. With an additional booster dose, however, protection is rapidly restored.

"Two doses probably don't provide optimal protection from Omicron as data from the UK shows. There is compelling evidence that a booster dose is important to provide the best protection against Omicron."

He adds that the general perception is that Omicron is mild and if one is well-vaccinated, it is going to remain mild. However, Omicron in an unvaccinated person is not necessarily a mild disease.

meera@mediaprima.com.my

The battle against Covid-19 is an ever-changing one.

FILE PICTURE



Vaccination is generally accepted as the most effective means to return to normalcy.

FILE PICTURE