

CodeBlue Launches Poll On Health Workers' Mental Health

Vaccine Messages Must Be Communicated All The Time — Ahmad Mahfuz Gazali

By CodeBlue | 10 March 2023

Similar and clear communication should be applied to all vaccines.

I feel compelled to respond to the article titled [“Startling Rise In Measles Cases”](#), published in *The Star* on March 4, 2023.

A sentence from the article that gave rise to some worry is ‘Although measles vaccination reached 95 per cent each year, 5 per cent (about 20,000 to 25,000) of the eligible children remained unvaccinated every year. Over the years, this number snowballs, and they remain susceptible to measles”.

The measles vaccine is not a vaccine newly introduced in Malaysia. In fact, it has been included in the National Immunisation Programme (NIP), since the 1950s.

Despite being introduced very early in Malaysia, what is worrying is that fewer children have been vaccinated with measles, and the problem is being manifested with an increase of 206 cases in 2022, compared to 128 cases reported in 2021.

The article stated that the movement control order during the Covid-19 pandemic might have caused a significant decrease in the number of parents who brought their children in for vaccination under the NIP.

Not underestimating the effect of the movement control order, the increase in unvaccinated children may be partly attributed to vaccine hesitancy, as the World Health Organization (WHO) has listed [vaccine hesitancy](#) as one of the ten threats to global health in 2019.

We also saw a similar trend with the uptake of Covid-19, especially with the second booster.

Only [1.6 per cent and 49.7 per cent of the Malaysian population](#) have taken up the first and second boosters respectively.

This is a far cry from 84.4 per cent of the Malaysian population who completed two primary doses of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Yes, we can argue that the Covid-19 vaccine mandate may force more than 80 per cent of the population to take up the vaccine.

But one thing that is clear is that communication about the Covid-19 vaccine was quite clear and easy to understand.

Former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin and health director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah regularly and repeatedly reminded the public about the importance of the Covid-19 vaccine. Yet, we do not see a similar effort in promoting the booster shots.

This has led to more than [1.1 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine being destroyed](#) after expiring, according to the 2021 audit report.

We do not want to see another report of any vaccine being wasted, simply because of the low uptake among Malaysians.

Vaccine communication must cover the basic WH questions, namely what, who, when, where, how, and why.

It is clear from the beginning that the Covid-19 vaccine is meant to avoid severe disease and hospitalisation, not to prevent infection or transmission.

Similar and clear communication should be applied to all vaccines, not only the ones offered under the NIP.

Other vaccines, such as for influenza, meningitis, and human papilloma virus, should be promoted and communicated clearly, despite not being offered under the NIP.

More importantly, the vaccine has been proven to be an effective public health tool to control or even eradicate infectious diseases.

Therefore, a simple and clear message must be spread to promote the vaccines.

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booster vaccines

Measles

vaccine

vaccine hesitancy