

# Faster vaccination rate needed to control Delta variant, urge medical experts

People may need vaccinations every few years and it all goes down to how fast the virus mutates, says medical expert

by AZALEA AZUAR

MORE studies need to be conducted on the highly contagious Covid-19 Delta variant, although vaccination and observing the standard operating procedures would be the best shield for now.

Malaysian Medical Association president Datuk Dr Subramaniam Muniandy said vaccination alone will not give full immunity, but it can help in keeping the transmission under control.

"This vaccination though, we won't be 100% immune against the variant because we have not yet found the vaccine for it.

Still, as long as there is some immunity given (via vaccine), the Delta variant can be kept under control," he told *The Malaysian Reserve* (TMR).

He said the current vaccination rollout is not fast enough and expressed frustration on people who still do not want to register for the Covid-19 vaccines.

"But they all must understand one thing, if they don't undergo this, then it is their risk. Not only do they risk their life, they can spread the disease to other people and travelling might be restricted," Dr Subramaniam said.

Right now, the Delta variant mostly infects younger people aged between 20 and 30.

According to Osel Group chief clinical and innovative scientist Dr Kris See, as we move further towards the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been increasingly clear that many of the tools and measures deployed by high-income countries against the virus are most probably not ideal in a low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

"One could argue that many LMICs have efficient health systems, but they tend to forget that these systems are brittle in the face of this pandemic. The lockdowns not only cause disruption to mobility, but also to medical supply chains and access to nutrition," he said.

Dr See also said the Delta variant contains multiple mutations and scientists are still unsure about the exact function of these mutations at the time.

However, they are associated



Pic by Muihd Amin Nizarul

An expert says the current vaccination rollout is not fast enough and expresses frustration on people who still do not want to register



Bernama

Though we won't be 100% immune, vaccination can help keep transmission under control, says Dr Subramaniam



Source: Twitter

The risk of ending up in hospital after becoming infected with Delta is almost double, says Dr See



Bloomberg

WHO's Dr Ghebreyesus says the new strain of the virus is infecting people 'at a scorching pace'

with enabling the virus to bind to the cells of humans, helping the virus to escape some immune responses. There is still not enough data to show whether this variant causes more deaths.

"What is known is that, according to the Public Health England, 117 of the 92,056 people infected with the Delta variant in the UK up to June 21 died. That means a fatality rate of 0.1%, which is very low in comparison to other variants," he explained.

However, experts also believed that the lower death rate was due to the large proportion of the UK population now vaccinated against the coronavirus.

This does not mean that Delta itself causes any less serious cases of the disease.

"Indeed, the hospitalisation rate reported so far from the UK indicates that the variant causes a more severe course of illness rather than a milder one: The risk of ending up in hospital after becoming infected with Delta is almost double compared to after being infected by the Alpha variant, according to a new study published in the medical journal *The Lancet*," Dr See added.

Bernama reported that World Health Organisation (WHO) DG Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned of "devastating outbreaks" caused by the Delta variant of Covid-19, saying that the new strain of the virus is infecting people "at a scorching pace".

"Last week marked the fourth consecutive week of increasing cases of Covid-19 globally," Dr Ghe-

breyesus said at a virtual press conference from Geneva, adding that "after 10 weeks of decline, deaths are increasing again".

While vaccination levels in some countries are reducing severe cases and hospitalisations, large parts of the world face oxygen shortages, a lack of hospital beds and higher mortality, said the WHO's Soumya Swaminathan in an interview with *Bloomberg Television* last week.

International Medical University virologist and lecturer Dr Kenny Voon explained how and why viruses need to mutate, which is to survive.

"Humans are a reservoir for the virus. We help it propagate more. It doesn't want to kill us, the host. If the host dies, there is no co-existence. This is why its main aim

is not to become more deadly," he said.

When a virus infects one species to another, we often see a high death rate because it has not learned to live within its new host.

"Laboratory results, from a study that compared infectivity and virulence of emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants in Syrian hamsters, show that while the Covid-19 virus has become more contagious, it has not become more deadly," Dr Voon mentioned.

This is still an inference made from laboratory experiments and it could differ in a real-world situation.

This is in the case of the Delta variant which has been speculated to be more deadly because of more death cases, but the results were the opposite during laboratory tests.

"We will only know once we have more data from community samples," Dr Voon added.

Even with these emerging variants and mutations, Dr Voon advises to maintain the current standard operating procedures (SOPs) which are washing hands, wearing masks and practising social distancing.

"That hasn't changed at all. The virus may become more infectious, but using the same SOPs will still help protect us," he said.

The new knowledge that the virus is airborne should also help us enhance certain habits such as double masking and washing out air conditioner's filters more often.

"When we talk about the virus being airborne, it is because both the virus and water vapour are so small they can bind to particles in the air. These particles are less than 2.5 microns and this is what makes it airborne," he said.

According to him, vaccinations remain as important as they have been shown to still be effective against the variants.

Whether the Covid-19 virus can spread from a vaccinated person still remains unknown as there are still too many variables that cannot be controlled.

Currently, scientists are studying the virus in order to create more effective vaccines and the results have shown antibodies we produce from the current vaccinations can last up to a year.

Dr Voon expects that the people may need vaccinations every few years and it all goes down to how fast the virus mutates and whether the vaccine will be able to protect us from the variants.