

## Booster shots of Covid-19 vaccine being studied; kids under 12 to get jabs next year



The Expert Committee on Covid-19 Vaccination is also looking into the issue of using the same vaccine or a different one. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



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PUBLISHED AUG 19, 2021, 6:35 PM SGT

**SINGAPORE** - Booster shots of the Covid-19 vaccine are being studied, while a third dose is being considered for those who have severely compromised immune systems, said the multi-ministry task force on Covid-19 on Thursday (Aug 19).

The vaccination of children below 12 years old should also start some time early next year, after the safety and efficacy aspects have been studied.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung, who co-chairs the task force, said: "We will very likely have to start a booster exercise. (Other) countries started vaccinations earlier than us, and we therefore now have the advantage of observing them and learning from their experiences."

He added that the Expert Committee on Covid-19 Vaccination here is actively working on the booster programme, and studying the results from other countries before finalising recommendations.

Mr Ong noted that Israel has started administering booster shots to their seniors and vulnerable persons. Meanwhile, Britain, Germany and France have announced that they will start their booster shots roll-out in September.

The United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has also just recommended booster shots, eight months after the second dose.

But one thing that the expert committee is clear on and will recommend is that Singapore will proceed to administer a third shot for patients who are severely immunocompromised at the time of their first two doses, Mr Ong said.

Some examples are transplant patients, those on immunosuppressive therapy, on cancer treatment and end-stage kidney disease patients on dialysis.

"Because of their conditions, these persons react much less to vaccination, even after two doses, meaning they cannot produce as much antibodies or activate the necessary mechanisms to fight the virus," he said.

"Hence, a third dose of vaccine is necessary for them. So the expert committee will be putting out their recommendations on this group shortly."

In the meantime, the expert committee is studying the incidence of adverse reactions from a booster shot in other countries.

"Will it be as low as the first and second dose, or higher? And if it's higher, what are the steps that we can take to mitigate or remove the risk?" Mr Ong said.

The committee is also looking into the issue of using the same vaccine or a different one.

There is scientific basis to suggest that using a different vaccine may confer stronger protection, he said, adding that Britain is implementing such a strategy and the committee will be monitoring the outcome closely.

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He noted: "In Singapore, too, we have not a small group - quite a sizeable group of people- who took the first shot of mRNA (vaccine), found out that they are allergic to it, and therefore completed their vaccinations using Sinovac.

"So the committee will be closely monitoring their immune response."

Mr Ong noted that the overall vaccination numbers have also fallen to around 20,000 a day, which is a quarter of what the figure used to be at its peak, which was 80,000 a day.



The overall vaccination numbers have also fallen to around 20,000 a day. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

"So we will progressively consolidate... and reduce the number of vaccination centres. So residents, you will get your community club facilities back shortly," he said.

But there will still be a certain number of vaccination centres operating to vaccinate the rest of the population who have not had the jab, such as young children.

"After we have properly studied the safety and efficacy aspects, the vaccination of children below 12... should start some time in early 2022," he said.

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