Coronavirus Multi-ministry Taskforce update

Singapore working to secure portfolio of vaccines, says Gan

Not relying on just one vaccine will allow it to cater to different segments of the population

Mr Gan noted that the Government will have to take into account vaccine efficacy and safety profile for different groups when deciding how to vaccinate the population. For example, some vaccines may not be effective for children and others may not be effective for seniors, he said.

Mr Gan also said negotiations with American pharmaceutical company Pfizer and various others that are conducting trials on vaccines are ongoing. Giving the expected global demand, diversifying Singapore’s vaccine portfolio will improve its chances of securing a suitable vaccine, he said at a virtual press conference by the Multi-ministry Taskforce on COVID-19 today.

Healthcare workers fighting the virus on the front lines will likely get the priority, followed by vulnerable groups like seniors, who form a result of infection, Mr Gan said.

The Ministry of Health’s director of medical services Kenneth Mak noted that one vaccine candidate developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech was recently found to be more than 90 per cent effective against COVID-19. He said that while this is welcome news, more information about it as well as others that are close to finishing phase three trials is needed.

For instance, if the vaccine does not provide long-lasting immunity, a patient may need repeated vaccinations instead of single dose. There should also be efforts to promote local development of a vaccine as well. Besides, an ongoing trial involving a partnership between American pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, Therapeutics and Duke-NUS Medical School.

“We are hopeful that these studies, these collaborations, will give us a suite of vaccine candidates that can provide good results for Singaporeans,” he said.

The Ministry of Health will set up an expert committee on Covid-19 vaccination, set up last month, will assess the data coming out of the trials and advise the ministry on its vaccination strategy. “In the meantime, it is important to continue to ensure that our safe distancing measures or precautionary measures are in place, and we continue to observe personal hygiene and so on,” said the minister.

“This will help reduce the overall infection rate in Singapore,” he said.

Responding to a question on the committee, Prof Mak said its members come from different sectors and agencies, including both academic and clinical institutions.

The ministry recently published the list of vaccines evaluated by the ministry from discussions with pharmaceutical companies. It will be given to the committee, subject to a confidentiality agreement, to help it conduct a detailed review and make recommendations.

“More details of the committee’s mission and composition will be released soon,” he added.

He said the ministry will begin educating people on the importance and benefits of getting vaccinated, and make informed decisions according to vaccination efforts, he said.

MULTIPLE VACCINE CANDIDATES

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VIGILANCE MUST CONTINUE

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HEALTH MINISTER KANKUN YONG