

Worries about serious side effects from jabs among parents' concerns

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

Parents remain concerned about the Covid-19 vaccine after the inoculation exercise for children aged five to 11 started about a week ago.

Among the top worries are the vaccine's long-term effects, as well as the children's eligibility for the jab if they have allergies or other underlying conditions.

About 1,300 parents submitted more than 900 questions at a webinar yesterday evening held by the Ministry of Education (MOE), together with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA).

Some asked if they would get government support if their child has medically serious side effects because of the vaccine; whether Singapore is considering non-mRNA vaccines for children; and whether schools will introduce vaccination-differentiated measures.

Dr Derrick Heng, deputy director of medical services in MOH's public health group, said the chances of any serious vaccine-related injury like myocarditis, or heart inflammation, are low.

Based on data from the 8.7 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine that have been administered to children in the United States, only 11 cases of myocarditis were found.

Dr Heng said: "Nevertheless, if that should unfortunately happen, the child will be eligible for subsidy that the Government provides, plus MediSave, MediShield and MediFund. In addition, for serious injury, there's also the vaccine injury financial assistance programme."

In response to questions about the purpose of the form that parents sign for their child to receive the Covid-19 vaccine, he said it is "not an indemnity form". "The aim basically is to ensure that the parent has read the accompanying information sheet so that he or she is aware of the benefits as well as the potential risks of the vaccine, and makes an informed choice for the child."

As at Dec 30, more than 4.2 million children aged five to 11 in the US have been fully vaccinated, and most side effects reported have been mild to moderate.

Dr Chan Si Min, head and senior consultant of the division of paediatric infectious diseases at Khoo Teck Puat-National University Children's Medical Institute in the National University Hospital, said children tend to have fewer side effects than older people.

Dr Chan added: "Generally, these symptoms are transient. They last one or two days, and then they go away completely after that."

Based on the knowledge of the vaccine's biology and how it works, there are no expectations of long-term side effects, she said.

Dr Heng said MOH is looking at making other vaccines available for children. But most of the trials for alternative vaccines are in fairly early stages, and it is unlikely that data will be out any time soon, he said.

Mr Tony Low, MOE's zonal director of schools in the east, and Ms Bernadette Alexander, ECDA's director of regulation and standards, said that schools and pre-schools currently do not have plans to introduce vaccination-differentiated measures for children.

ateng@sph.com.sg