

# **Getting The Jab: An Update on the COVID-19 Vaccination in Malaysia**



# The Buzz on COVID-19 Vaccination in Malaysia

This whitepaper aims to understand Malaysians' sentiment towards the **National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme in Malaysia** on social media platforms and news sites with **1,103,319 total buzz**.

In terms of media type, this report includes materials from:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- News sites

The date range for this whitepaper is from April 1 to Aug 11, 2021.



# Malaysia's COVID-19 Vaccine Portfolio

According to the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme Coordinating Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, the government has secured access to enough COVID-19 vaccines to cover 130% of the entire country's population.

As at August 2021, there are seven brands of COVID-19 vaccine that have been approved for use in Malaysia:

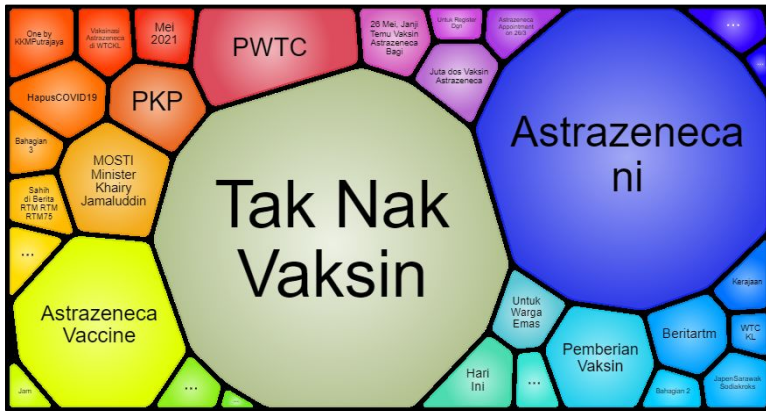
**Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Sinovac, CansinoBIO, Moderna, Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) and Sinopharm (Beijing).**

[Sources: [\*The Special Committee for Ensuring Access to COVID-19 Vaccine Supply \(JKJAV\)\*](#) & [\*COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker\*](#)]





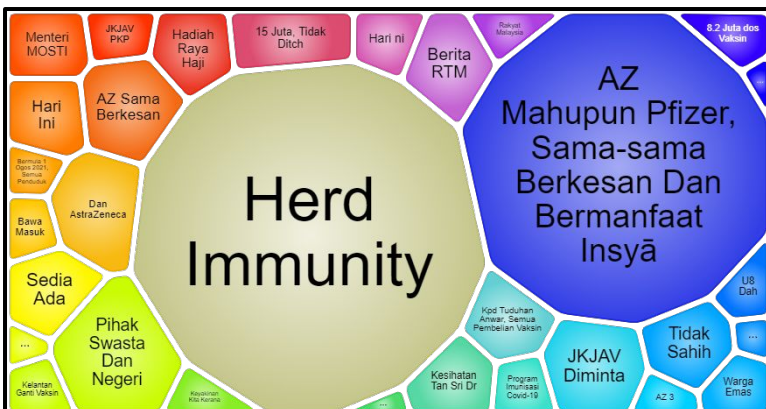
# Which Vaccine Brands are Most Mentioned and Preferred by Malaysians?



AstraZeneca



Pfizer



Sinovac/Coronavac

Based on conversations observed on Twitter, AstraZeneca was the most mentioned vaccine brand with 12,356 of total buzz volume compared to Pfizer and Sinovac which had a total of 6,194 and 2,250 buzz volume respectively.

This was due to the announcement made by the NIP Coordinating Minister Khairy Jamaluddin on Apr 28 regarding the government's decision to not include the AstraZeneca vaccine under the immunisation programme . The AstraZeneca vaccine has stirred controversies following cases of thrombosis among recipients reported in European countries. Hence, Khairy revealed that the AstraZeneca vaccine would only be used under a separate registration channel for volunteers.

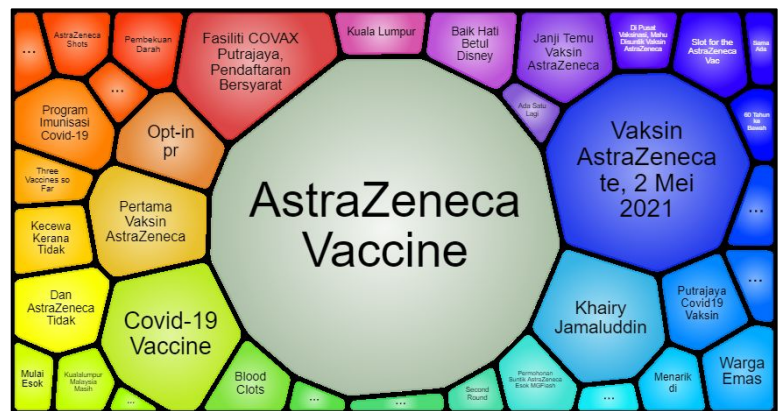
However, the Pfizer vaccine seemed to be the most preferred vaccine mainly due to its highest efficacy rate of 95%, apart from it being pricier than the other brands, which made people believe that it was the most effective vaccine.

# Which Vaccine Brands are Most Mentioned and Preferred by Malaysians?

Based on conversations observed on Facebook, AstraZeneca was also the most mentioned vaccine brand with 35,058 of total buzz volume compared to Sinovac and Pfizer, which had a total of 15,206 and 13,812 buzz volume, respectively.

Similar to Twitter, AstraZeneca was the most mentioned mainly due to the announcement made by Khairy Jamaluddin on Apr 28 to offer a separate registration platform for AstraZeneca vaccine for volunteers. He also said that the AstraZeneca vaccine would be offered on a “first come, first served” basis to the general public in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

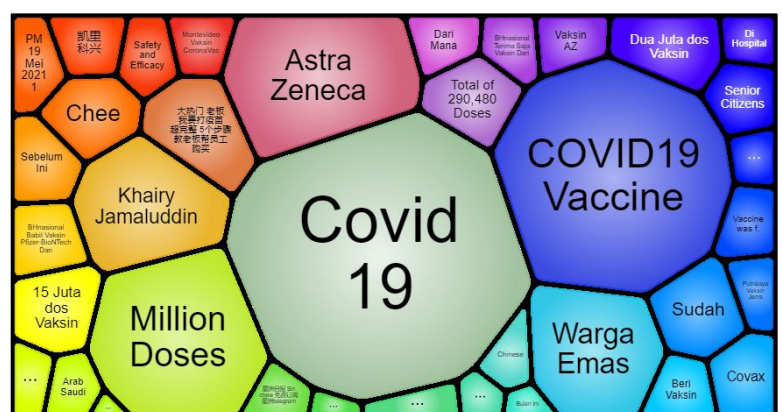
Meanwhile, Sinovac was the second most mentioned COVID-19 vaccine brand on Facebook, mainly owing to coverage on the plans to provide the Sinovac vaccine to senior citizens during phase 2 of the NIP starting April 19, as stated by Khairy Jamaluddin.



AstraZeneca



Pfizer



Sinovac/Coronavac

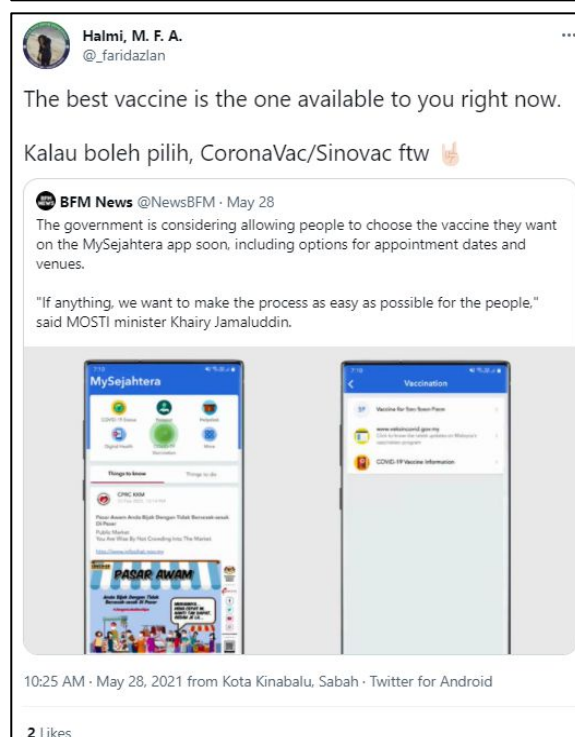


# To Be or Not To Be Vaccinated?

There are two main reasons that led to vaccine hesitancy in Malaysia:

- Concerns or selectiveness over vaccine brands. [1 2]
- The existence of anti-vaccine groups. [1 2 3]

According to Monash University Malaysia's Dr Vinod RMT Balasubramaniam, vaccine hesitancy due to concerns over specific vaccine brands may be causing unnecessary delays in Malaysia's immunisation programme [Link]. Even though the COVID-19 vaccine brand does not really matter because all brands available in Malaysia had already been approved by the NPRA, some people still expressed concerns over certain vaccine brands, which they believed to be less effective than the others.



# Anti-Vaxxers: Why They Exist?



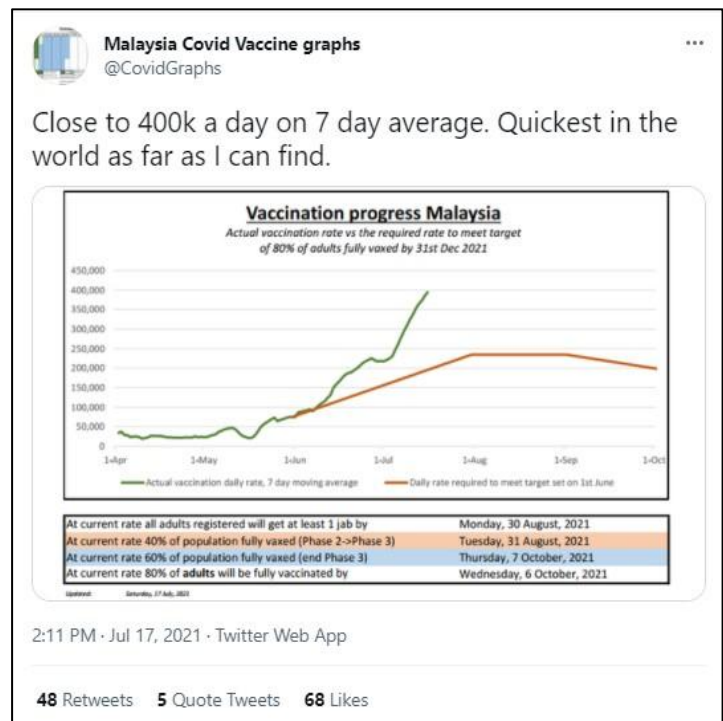
Vaccination opposition isn't a new concept. As long as there have been vaccines, there have been people who objected to them.

Anti-vaxxers refer to people who disagree with the use of vaccines for a variety of reasons including:

- Religious beliefs [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] (some cite religious beliefs as the reason behind their refusal to get vaccinated, though most mainstream religions do not condemn vaccines; doubts over the Halal status of the vaccines)
- Belief in conspiracy theories [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] (COVID-19 vaccines have a tracking device; Jewish agenda; COVID-19 is a hoax)
- View of vaccine as an infringement of human rights. [1, 2, 3, 4]
- Being skeptical with the effectiveness of the vaccines. [1, 2, 3, 4]

# The Current COVID-19 Vaccination Landscape in Malaysia

In the initial stage of the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme, social media chatters showed that people were outraged by the slow process. Many noted how those who had registered for the COVID-19 vaccination via the MySejahtera app as early as February 2021 had yet to receive their appointment dates. Angry conversations about how some Malaysians who are in the high-risk groups (senior citizens and individuals with autoimmune diseases) but had yet to be vaccinated were all over Facebook and Twitter. [1, 2, 3, 4]



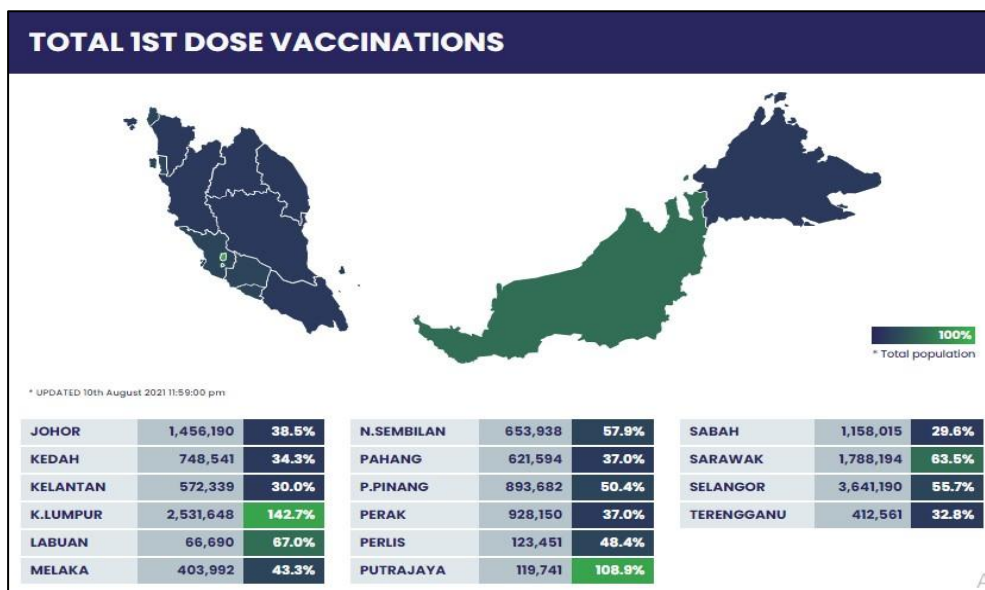
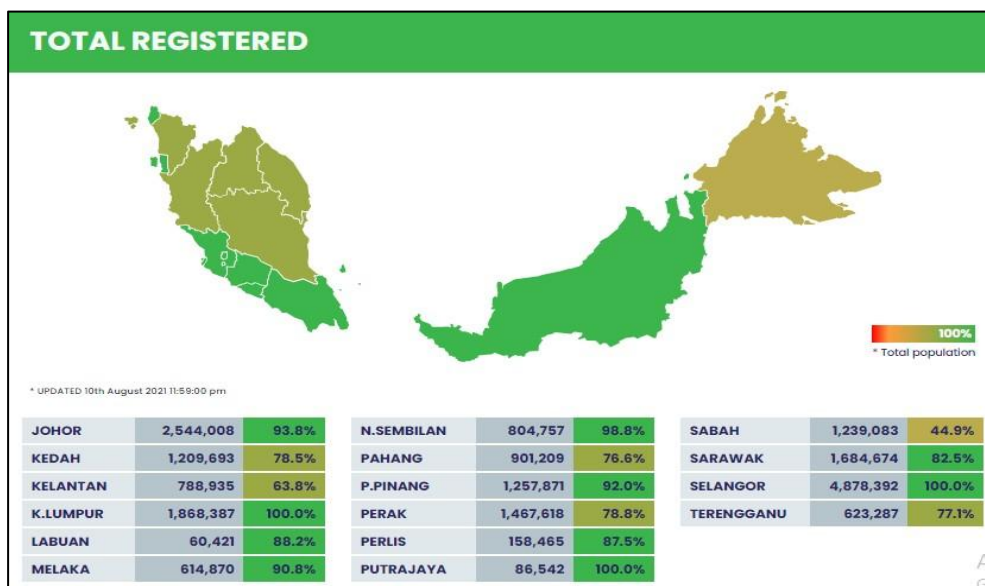
However, as the vaccination programme picked up its pace, the people's sentiment had also improved. A poll created on Twitter by "@accesstrade\_my" on Jul 19 showed that 61.3% of the 119 voters said that Malaysia's vaccination progress was "quite fast", while the other 38.7% voted for "too slow". [1] A tweet by "@CovidGraphs" stated that Malaysia was "the quickest in the world" with nearly 400,000 per day of actual vaccination daily rate on a seven-day moving average. The tweet was even reposted by Australian professor Nick Bisley, who said that Australia could learn "a thing or two" from Malaysia. [1, 2, 3]



# The Race to Vaccinate Sabah

According to Malaysian Paediatric Association, in order to achieve herd immunity against COVID-19, it requires about 80% of the Malaysian population to be vaccinated.

The current population of Malaysia in 2021 is 32,817,264 and to date, 20,188,212 had registered for the COVID-19 vaccine and 16,119,916 of the population had received their 1<sup>st</sup> dose. This shows that 65.33% of the Malaysian population has registered for the COVID-19 vaccine by Aug 11.



[Data obtained from [vaksincovid.gov.my](https://vaksincovid.gov.my)]

# The Race to Vaccinate Sabah

As at mid-June, 30.54% of Sabah's population had registered for the COVID-19 vaccination. Although the number had improved from just 17.65% by May 25 and 19.67% by Jun 6 to 46.1% by Aug 7, Sabah remained as the state with the lowest COVID-19 vaccination registration rate in Malaysia.

According to Datuk Junz Wong, Sabah Heritage Party (Warisan) vice-president, the main reason for Sabah's low registration rate is not the fear of vaccination, but instead it was the lack of vaccines and poor Internet access in the rural areas of the state.



Sabah COVID-19 spokesman Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun stated that most Sabahans in the rural areas prefer manual registration, therefore the number could be inaccurate, as the manual registration had not been factored into the system yet [1]. Some of the reasons gathered by Malay Mail from villagers included the lack of access to smartphones or tech-savviness as well as lackadaisical attitude, either out of fear or procrastination.

# Malaysia's COVID-19 Vaccination Rate Compared to the rest of Southeast Asia

According to a special report published on Apr 26 by The Edge Markets [1], 9.05M Malaysians had registered for the COVID-19 vaccination as at Apr 19. However, very few of them had received notifications of the scheduled appointments. The report also noted that merely over 2% of total Malaysians had received at least 1 dose as at Apr 19. Meanwhile in Singapore, over 23% of the population had received at least 1 dose and even Indonesia had a better rate than Malaysia at 4%.

The issue was, according to The Edge Market's report, underpinned by the delay in the signing of procurement agreements with vaccine manufacturers in 2020, as Malaysia waited for the complete analysis and concrete evidence of the safety and efficacy of each vaccine brand.

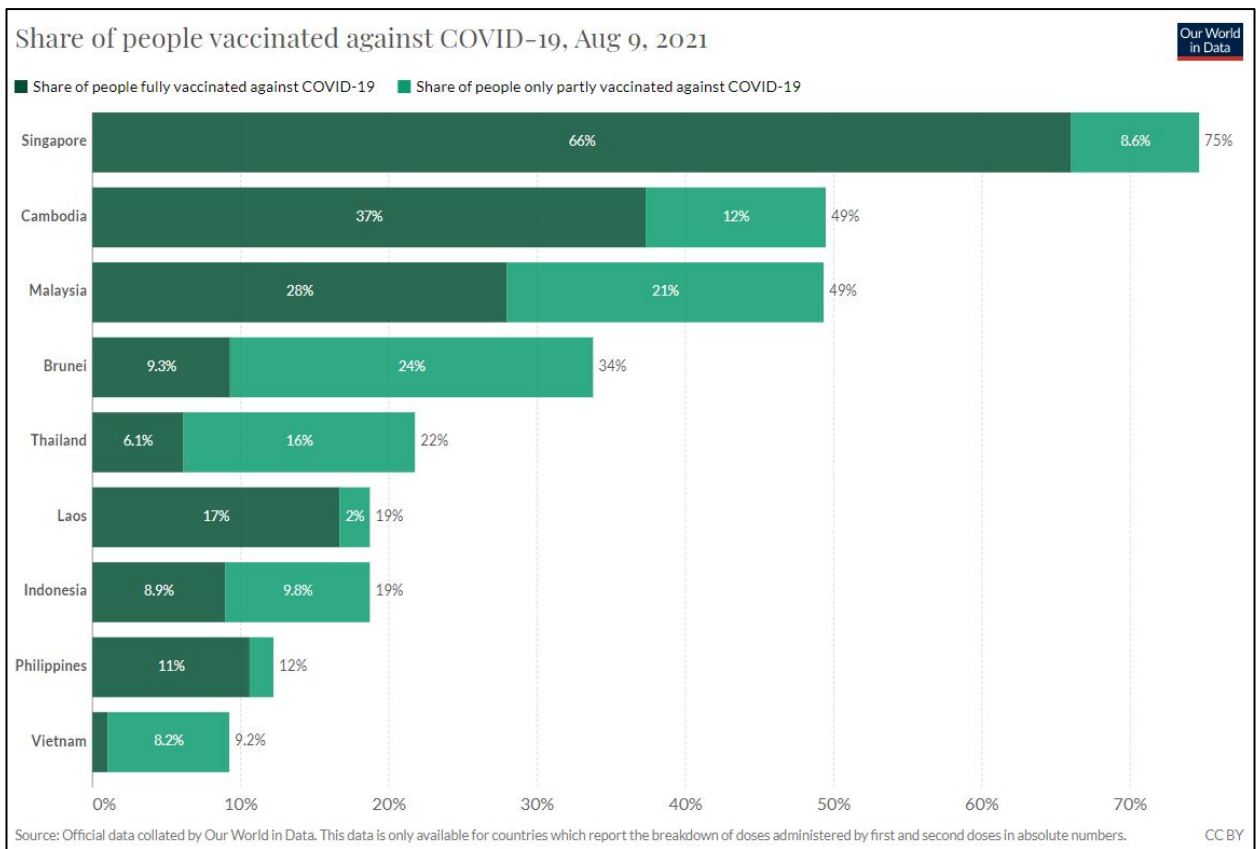
As a result, Malaysia ended up far behind the queue for the delivery of vaccines, as the country's 1st deal for 1.2M doses of the Pfizer vaccine was only signed on Nov 27, 2020. The delay could be the cause in the rise in cases, resulting in renewed movement control orders (MCO) throughout the nation.





# Malaysia's COVID-19 Vaccination Rate Compared to the rest of Southeast Asia

However, the share of people who received at least 1 dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in Malaysia had reached slightly over 10% by Jun 15 and it had increased to 49% (15.96M people) as at Aug 9, according to Our World in Data (see [chart below](#)). From the total, 8.5M Malaysians or 28% of the population have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.



According to Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, Malaysia is among the fastest countries to vaccinate its people against the coronavirus. Public health researcher Lim Chee Han said that as at Jul 27, Malaysia is faster than the world's average (13.23% fully vaccinated) and Asia's average (9.81%) [1].

Compared to its Southeast Asian neighbours, Malaysia is currently the 3<sup>rd</sup> country with the biggest share of people vaccinated against COVID-19, following Singapore and Cambodia at the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> places respectively. Singapore leads with 66% of its population have been fully vaccinated, while 37% of Cambodia's population have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

# Looking Back, Moving Forward

- The government could ramp up efforts to encourage those who were unable to register for appointments and those who have yet to receive their appointments after Aug 1 to use the drive-through/walk-in vaccination facility.
- KKM could collaborate with private hospitals and medical centres outside of the Klang Valley to speed up vaccination process.
- KKM could expedite its movement in reaching more population that might not have easy access to vaccination centres in rural areas, government social housing in urban areas and nursing homes especially in states with low vaccine registration rates such as Sabah by renting empty community halls, universities, hotels and other appropriate facilities to set up more mobile clinics.
- Vaccine corps could be formed by community grassroots, comprised of unemployed clinicians, besides medical, nursing and pharmacy students who could travel to remote villages in Sabah and assist individuals who do not have internet access or digital gadgets to register for vaccination.
- The government could encourage the public and private higher learning institutions to embark on COVID-19 vaccine development research projects to ensure a steady supply of locally procured and affordable vaccines.



# What Our Insights Analysts in Malaysia Say

**Nurul Hanani Junaidi**, Insights Analyst, Malaysia

"It is clear that Malaysians' sentiment towards the COVID-19 vaccination has improved now compared to the earlier stages of the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme. However, vaccine hesitancy is still observed among some Malaysians and the reasons include the lack of full approval of the COVID-19 vaccines from the US FDA. I am hopeful that once that happens, it will increase the number of fully vaccinated people in Malaysia especially Sabah and help us achieve herd immunity as soon as possible."



**Ameera Shaharuddin**, Insights Analyst, Malaysia

"COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. And if you get sick, you could spread the disease to family, friends, and others around you. That's why it is important to get vaccinated once it is available to you to make sure your immune system is ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Hence, Malaysians should stay home, get vaccinated, follow the SOP thoroughly and stop blaming others. #KitaJagaKita"





Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us for more information on this whitepaper.

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