

VACCINATIONS FOR STUDENTS IN PREPARATION TOWARDS LIFE WITH COVID-19

By Corporate Communications Division, Ministry of Education

Brunei Darussalam has entered the endemic phase commencing on 15 December 2021. In preparation towards the endemic phase, students aged 12 to 17 years nationwide have completed two doses of COVID-19 vaccine under the National Vaccination Programme. The first and second doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine were administered from 8 to 19 November 2021 and 6 to 15 December 2021 respectively.

The National Vaccination Programme was organised by the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs, aiming to curb the spread of COVID-19. The programme also helped the country to achieve its vaccination rate target.

As early as 7.15am, students from all schools nationwide, accompanied by one of their parents or guardians, were already queueing at designated vaccination centres for their jab appointment. In all four districts, eight venues were selected for vaccination centres, particularly the Indoor Stadium, Hassanal Bolkiah National Sports Complex; Universiti Brunei Darussalam; Jubli Emas Health Centre Bunut; Medical Reception Station (MRS) Bolkiah Garrison; Dewan Seri Kenangan, Pekan Tutong; Learning and Development Centre (LDC), Hospital Suri Seri Begawan; Panaga Health Centre; and Dewan Kemasyarakatan Belalong, Pekan Bangar.

Whole-of-Nation Approach

All vaccination centres aimed to cater all students from all four districts. In light of this, officials including school leaders, teachers, staff and volunteers from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs lent their support during the implementation of the vaccination programme. Different tasks were assigned and delegated including scheduling time slots, providing transportation to the vaccination centres, checking student attendance as well as preparing and distributing packs of food and drinks for students. The effort was part of the whole-of-nation approach in ensuring the standard operating procedure was being adhered to and the registration as well as vaccination processes for all students run smoothly and efficiently.

Principal of Sekolah Menengah Sayyidina Abu Bakar Madam Sia Ai Chin made sure that all instructions and information from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health were well received and acted upon. She said, "As a school leader, I also ensure all relevant data on students are collected and prepared, vital information conveyed and communicated to parents."

"With the full cooperation from parents and teachers, we are able to get all students' data ready. Vaccination schedules for all of our students to be vaccinated are done in an efficient manner. Coordination between frontliners, Ministry of Education officers and school teachers is also well executed on vaccination day. All in all, we have a smooth process from the beginning until the end," she added.

Sharing her experience working at UBD Vaccination Centre was Dayang Hajah Rosediana binti Haji Hidop, a Senior Education Officer at the Department of Co-Curricular Education, Ministry of Education, said, "I was assigned as a focal officer at UBD Vaccination Centre should any matter arise during the programme. My duties also involve monitoring the implementation of the vaccination programme and ensuring the process runs as smoothly as possible."

"Working with frontliners such as doctors, officers in vaccination management and implementation, volunteers and uniformed teams motivates us from the Ministry of Education to work together by contributing our time and energy to our country," she added.



A parent and his daughter are given the International Certificate of Vaccination card after the vaccination process at Jubli Emas Vaccination Centre

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Officials, school leaders, teachers, staff and volunteers from the Ministry of Education pose for a group photo

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According to another focal officer, Awang Mohammad Zamery bin Haji Nayan, Religious Education Officer from Islamic Studies Department, Ministry of Religious Affairs, the government is doing its best in curbing the COVID-19 pandemic especially with the implementation of the vaccination programme.

"Everyone involved in making the National Vaccination Programme a success deserves praise for delivering their duties responsibly," he said.

Importance of COVID-19 Vaccination

Students breathed sighs of relief as they walked out of the vaccination centres with their parents after completing their first and second doses of the vaccination. Many students, parents and teachers saw the opportunity to get vaccinated as a way for them to not only protect themselves but also to protect everyone around them, especially their loved ones.

Sekolah Menengah Sufri Bolkiah student Dayang Hannah Mimrah Inarah binti Haji Masri expressed her joy for being able to do her part by getting vaccinated. She said, "*Alhamdulillah*, the National Vaccination Programme means a lot to everyone especially the students aged 12 to 17 years."

"I am nervous and excited at the same time after receiving my first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Thousand thanks to all frontliners and everyone involved in making sure we are vaccinated," she added.

Father of a student from Sekolah Menengah Sayyidina Hasan, Awang Rudy bin Haji Adinin said, "I am grateful that my child has received her COVID-19 vaccines to protect herself from the pandemic. Getting vaccinated is also important in order to help the government achieve its vaccination target and reach herd immunity."

While accompanying her child's vaccination appointment at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam Vaccination Centre, mother of a student from Sekolah Menengah Rimba II Dayang Nurul Syazwani Wahidah @ Nabilah binti Ampuan Ahad said, "Now that the students have been vaccinated, they can go to school in the near future and attend their physical classes, which have been interrupted due to the pandemic."

Mother of a student from Sekolah Arab Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Dayang Hajah Noraizan binti Haji Lamit supported the government's effort especially the National Vaccination Programme as it is for everyone's safety and well-being. "I feel grateful to Allah SWT and thank you to the Government of His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam for making the vaccination possible for the young people. Teachers and students will feel assured and at ease when they start learning face-to-face at schools," she said.

Cikgu Haryani binti Haji Mohammad of Sekolah Menengah Sayyidina Hassan, who was on duty at Jubli Emas Vaccination Centre, said, "Getting vaccinated is important for our students aged 12 to 17 years in order to strengthen their immunity and prepare them towards the endemic phase. The National Vaccination Programme allows that opportunity and at the same time helps the government to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the country."



Awang Rudy bin Haji Adinin with his daughter pose for a photo

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Focal Officer for Dewan Seri Kenangan Vaccination Centre in Tutong Ampuan Hajah Lilimaryani binti Ampuan Haji Salleh said, "The COVID-19 vaccination is essential for people of all walks of life, including special needs people. Priority will be given to special needs students who find it difficult to practise social distancing or keep wearing masks."

A parent of a special needs student, Khairul Fadzwa Muhammad Izzul Iman, brought his child to the Tutong vaccination centre said, "Syukur Alhamdulillah, after bringing my child to get his vaccination, I feel relieved and safe for my child now."

Hopes for the Future

At the vaccination centres, excitement was in the air as the availability of the first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccines for these young people brings future hopes of moving forward and living in the new normal especially their life as a student. This means allowance for reopening of schools, learning face-to-face, meeting family members, teachers, friends and so forth, while also maintaining the current standard operating procedure.

Expressing her hope, mother of a student from Sekolah Rendah Bengkurong SuzyLawati binti Haji Awang Yahya said, "The vaccination programme is necessary for us to move on. I hope all parents or guardians encourage their children to get vaccinated so that we can return to life in the new norm as soon as possible."

Furthermore, many students are looking forward to resuming old routines and attending physical classes after completing their second dose of COVID-19 vaccines. Expressing his excitement, a student from Ma'had Islam Brunei, Muhammad Irfan bin Haji Abdul Gapar said, "I feel happy as I have completed my second dose of COVID-19 vaccine. I hope to be able to do my daily routines without worrying so much and go back to physical school in the new normal."

School leader of Sekolah Rendah Lambak Kanan Jalan 49 Cikgu Hajah Noorliah binti Haji Aspar said that in preparation for the endemic phase, "All students should always be cautious living in the new norm despite having completed the vaccination. Make sure to adhere to the standard operating procedure set by the Ministry of Health."

Schools nationwide will reopen in phases beginning on 3 January 2022. As 98 per cent of all students nationwide had completed their COVID-19 vaccine, this confirms that parents and guardians are well aware of the importance of getting the COVID-19 vaccine for their children.



A teacher taking student attendance during the vaccination programme at Learning and Development Centre (LDC), Hospital Suri Seri Begawan

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A teacher taking student attendance during the vaccination programme at Indoor Stadium Hassanal Bolkiah National Sports Complex