

Understand the benefits

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I REFER to the statement by the Deputy Health Minister to the media that "Vaccination given to children nine months old and above is now only at 89%, short of the target 95% in order to control any outbreaks" (Feb 24).

There is arguably no single preventive health intervention more cost effective than immunisation. Expanding access to immunisation is crucial to prevent suffering and death associated with infectious diseases, and enable national development like education and economic progress to take place.

According to the World Health Organisation, two to three million deaths are prevented by vaccination every year and an additional 1.5 million deaths could be avoided if global vaccination coverage improves.

Vaccines are necessary alongside good hygiene, sanitation, clean water and nutrition in the fight against infectious diseases. The optimum rate of immunisation or "herd immunity" must be achieved to prevent the return of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccinations are safe. Every licensed vaccine is vigorously tested across multiple phases of trials before it is approved for use, and it is regularly re-assessed once it is



on the market. The scientific community is constantly monitoring information from several sources for any sign that a vaccine may cause an adverse event.

Most vaccine reactions are usually minor and temporary. In the rare event a serious side-effect is reported, it is immediately investigated. It is far more likely to be seriously injured by a vaccine-preventable disease than by a vaccine.

An "adverse event" is any health problem that happens after a dose of vaccine. It might happen by pure coincidence or is caused by the vaccine.

A side-effect is any health problems shown by studies to be caused by a vaccine, and they are usually minor and transient.

It is the business of everyone to stop vaccine-preventable diseases. Healthcare professionals, com-

munities, politicians, regulatory authorities, parents, teachers and school administrators must all step up to enhance vaccine promotion and break the barriers of myths and misinformation.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Committee on Adolescent Health in its 2017 opinion paper, for example, states that obstetricians and gynaecologists, including all healthcare workers, have an important role in educating parents on the importance of vaccination for their children.

Every parent must understand the benefits of vaccination and the need to protect their children.

It is time now that we all embrace solid scientific facts about the benefits and safety of vaccination rather than dabble in dangerous half-truths and rumours that may cause permanent disability or death.

We must all join in this noble effort to fight against vaccine-preventable diseases and ensure that every child's health and future is protected.

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