
AMCHAM Press Statement: Impact of the vaccine roll-out programme
Wednesday, 17 February 2021

1. How will this latest development impact the economy/trading sectors?

The vaccine roll-out program is indeed good news to the business community as it will bring much needed stability to daily operations and drive businesses towards operating at full capacity. Only then will we see if the economy can recover from some devastating losses in some sectors and deliver the anticipated economic rebound.

To facilitate the economic recovery, AMCHAM urges the government to provide more clarity in the vaccine roll-out plan for industry and businesses. For example, the Prime Minister announced yesterday that essential and security services would qualify to be vaccinated in the first and second phase but it remains to be seen which sectors would fall under these categories.

2. What are AMCHAM views on companies' business operations after the vaccine programme begins?

Transitioning from crisis-mode into restoring full operations, developing talent and expanding the business will be the promise of a well-run vaccine distribution plan.

However, we are all aware that the vaccine only serves to minimize the severity of the symptoms of a person infected by COVID-19, and does not prevent the person from spreading or being infected by the virus. As such, it is unlikely that we will see much change in operations until the majority of the workforce is immunized. Furthermore, SOPs will still need to be in place to ensure containment of the spread.

Many are looking forward to business travel opening up again to help with operations, growth and future expansion plans. Mobility of the workforce will also be greatly enhanced. As a nation that is suffering a shortage of skilled workers in critical sectors, a vaccinated population will enhance the ability for these skills to be developed on the ground by positions filled by expatriates, and Malaysians travelling abroad for training will also feel more at ease.

An AMCHAM survey conducted earlier this month showed that 42% of respondents need more employees to return to the workplace. Despite adapting to a work-from-home reality, many companies have seen efficiencies drop and experienced the negative impact of employees juggling life and work. Companies are anxious to support employees with a return to a better work-life balance. A well-implemented vaccination program will also restore confidence within the

workforce and enable them to be back at the office, with revised SOPs to reflect reduced threat levels.

The reopening and restoration of regular school hours will also be critical deliverables of the vaccine rollout. This will provide parents the much needed relief and for the children, the crucial social and physical interaction with their peers.

Some sectors have struggled to be spatially distanced by virtue of the nature of their operations. These sectors will be anxious to be prioritized in some manner, especially those which are critical to the economic rebound process. Their concerns are valid as the majority of their workforce will fall in the last phase of the current rollout plan. We would encourage constructive conversations between the government and critical industry partners to discuss the current plan and address the potential impact on common goals.

3. Expectations on the programme roll-out?

The vaccines will offer new hope to businesses and consumers but we must keep our expectations modest. While we are certain the government will be focused on delivering and distributing in a methodical and clearly communicated manner, we only need to look at the difficulties faced in countries preceding us and hope that the Malaysian roll-out will incorporate lessons learned.

The cold-chain logistics for Malaysia is going to be very challenging as is the distribution network's capacity and ability to penetrate the less accessible people, both in rural and urban areas. The prospect of an uneven distribution including deviations from the tiered plan will be of concern. To combat this, we hope that the government will improve its communication systems and be more transparent with the processes involved and the sharing of data including the number of doses received, administered and lost in the various sectors of the population.

A well-executed program will be a critical factor to ensure confidence to both the business community at home and abroad, along with the people in the country, that they will have access to the vaccine, should they choose to be vaccinated.

For more information, please contact:

Media Contact:

Yvonne Miranda

Membership & Engagement Manager

T: +603 2727 0070 | M: +6012 398 0072 | E: yvonne@amcham.com.my

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The American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) was founded in 1978 as an international, non-profit, private-sector business association. It comprises more than 1200 members representing about 280 American, Malaysian and other international companies with strong ties to American business. The Chamber is a member of the AmChams of Asia Pacific.

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