

Most feel COVID-19 vaccination should be compulsory for Singaporeans, long-term residents: IPS study

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SINGAPORE: Nearly 70 per cent of respondents in recent surveys feel that the Government should make COVID-19 vaccination compulsory for all Singaporeans and long-term residents, according to a study conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

Respondents, made up of Singaporeans and permanent residents, were polled in "waves" that coincided with key events in Singapore's fight against COVID-19.

Between Sep 15 and 21 - around the time when a spike of infections was reported - 65 per cent of respondents agreed that vaccination should be mandatory.

This figure rose to 70 per cent for the poll between Nov 19 and 23, according to findings that were released on Thursday (Dec 2).

About 500 people were polled in each wave through an online survey, said IPS. Twelve waves were covered between Jul 14 and Nov 23 - from the second Phase 2 (Heightened Alert) to the start of the Transition Phase.

Respondents were also asked about taking annual booster shots and more than 90 per cent felt it was important to do so.

"This suggests that the majority of the population recognise the importance of taking vaccination," the study said.

Titled "Living with COVID-19 in Singapore: Attitudes, challenges and the way ahead", the study examined people's views in three areas – governance of COVID-19, living with COVID-19 and attitudes towards safe management measures.

Slightly more than half felt positive about having differentiated measures for vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

Older Singaporeans were more likely to feel negative about the vaccination-differentiated measures, with about 30 per cent of respondents aged 60 and above having this point of view. This is compared to 19 per cent for those aged 21 to 29.

"The differentiated measures for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals would likely affect those Singaporeans who choose to remain unvaccinated because of non-medical reasons, of which senior citizens likely make up a sizeable proportion," the study said.

Led by Dr Mathew Mathews, principal research fellow and head of Social Lab at IPS, the study also involved former research associate Syafiq Suhaini, associate director Mike Hou and research assistant Fiona Phoa.

GOVERNANCE OF COVID-19

The study found that respondents were least happy with the Government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic from September to October.

The fluctuations in satisfaction appeared to move in tandem with the daily case numbers, the report said.

In September, Singapore saw [a sharp spike in cases](#), hitting more than 1,000 daily infections from Sep 18. The Government then [limited dining at food and beverage outlets](#) to two vaccinated people and also capped social gatherings in what it called the Stabilisation Phase.

These restrictions were meant to be in place until Oct 24 but were extended to Nov 21.

When asked how satisfied they were with what the Government was doing to reduce the number of daily infections, the proportion of those who were satisfied dropped from 74 per cent between Jul 14 and 25 to 69 per cent between Jul 26 and Aug 7.

This was followed by some ups and downs in the following waves. In the most recent wave between Nov 19 and 23, this proportion stood at 57 per cent.

While satisfaction levels fell slightly for most of the policies as the number of community cases shot up in later waves, satisfaction levels have stabilised and remained relatively high, the study found.

“This is especially the case for satisfaction in keeping the healthcare system running where around 80 per cent of respondents indicated satisfaction,” the study said.

LIVING WITH COVID-19

When it came to treating COVID-19 as an endemic virus, around 40 per cent of respondents from a poll in July to one in September felt positive about this strategy. Confidence in the strategy took a hit in early October but increased to 51 per cent in the most recent poll from Nov 19 to 23.

Older respondents were less likely to feel positive about how COVID-19 was treated as an endemic virus, the study found.

Respondents were presented with two options based on what experts said - a slow opening if Singapore wants to keep the COVID-19 death rate to about two per day; or a faster opening that would mean a daily death rate of about six to seven.

At least 80 per cent of respondents said Singapore should have a slower reopening with fewer deaths, as opposed to opening quickly but with a higher death count.

Around seven in 10 Singaporeans believed that Singapore would win the fight against COVID-19.

The study found “clear distinctions” in attitudes towards endemic living based on age and socioeconomic status.

“Those who were younger, as well as those who were more affluent, were consistently observed to be more enthusiastic about and psychologically ready for endemic living, as compared to those who were older and less affluent,” the study found.

Many factors may underpin these differential perceptions, the study said.

These include one’s risk appetite, perceived missed opportunities, confidence in one’s physical health, as well as better financial capabilities in handling the economic impact of being infected.

SAFE MANAGEMENT MEASURES

At least 80 to 90 per cent of Singaporeans believed that observing safe management measures like taking regular COVID-19 tests, reducing social meetings and taking annual booster vaccine shots would reduce chances of COVID-19 infection.

At the same time, roughly one-quarter of respondents in polls between July and October said that these measures were inconvenient. This proportion increased slightly thereafter.

Close to six in 10 said they support a mask-wearing mandate only when indoors or when it is crowded, while close to half supported allowing people to unmask when outdoors or in uncrowded spaces.

Higher-income and younger respondents were more likely to support an easing of safe management measures, the study found.

"This could be indicative of "Generation COVID", youth who have missed out on key life opportunities just as they approach adulthood. Opening up could represent a chance to get their lives back," the study said.