

Enhancing vaccine confidence during COVID-19 and beyond

As COVID-19 continues to spread around the world and at an accelerated pace for some regions, many hopes are pinned on the regulatory approvals and subsequent delivery of various late-stage COVID-19 vaccines.

As people and companies work around the clock in finding the solutions to ensure the health of our healthcare workers and people, and rightly so, we must not forget about the other infectious diseases that we have worked hard to keep at bay.

According to research and analysis by the World Health Organization, vaccination is one of the most cost-effective ways to avoid diseases. An estimated 5 million deaths are avoided every year with vaccination. If global vaccination coverage increases, a further 1.5 million deaths can be prevented.

With the exception of clean, safe drinking water, no human endeavor rivals vaccination in combating infectious diseases and reducing mortality rates. Vaccination beyond childhood brings significant benefits at the individual, community and socioeconomic levels and remains one of the most powerful and cost-effective preventions available to protect against several diseases.

Despite the benefits of vaccination, WHO in 2019 recognized the issues around vaccine uptake and coined "vaccine hesitancy" as one of the biggest threats to global health.

Beyond COVID-19, life-course immunization will continue to be an integral part of keeping infectious diseases at bay. They are critical and yet underutilized public health interventions. Vaccination beyond childhood is not well understood by populations, and subsequently, elective vaccination rates are often very low, worryingly so for the elderly and more vulnerable.

I recently had the opportunity to deep-dive into the challenges and solutions to increasing vaccine confidence in life-course vaccination at the EU-ASEAN Business Council webinar on Vaccine Confidence in the Time of COVID-19: Asia's Time to Act.

For me, there are two key barriers that hamper efforts to improve vaccine confidence in the region. First, the spread of misinformation and second, the role of mainstream and social media. The most important and significant barrier is the spread of misinformation, falsehoods and



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conspiracy theories, which are creating fear, confusion and reduced trust in the importance of vaccination. Sensationalized and inaccurate reporting by media outlets can often cause unintended and long-term consequences on vaccine confidence.

And we now have the more recent issue of social media being at the center of misinformation spreading at an alarming rate, to the point where the WHO has coined the term "infodemic".

There is a need for more awareness and education on the benefits of elective vaccination. While the benefits of childhood vaccinations are clear, and many countries have compulsory vaccination schedules and mechanisms for delivering vaccines effectively to a pediatric population, the challenge is bigger for adults and the elderly.

companies have a crucial role to play in directing people who are searching for information on vaccination to reliable and credible sources such as the WHO. This can help mitigate the spread of misinformation. Social media companies can work together with third-party organizations to ensure that their content is easily accessible and searchable through their social media platforms.

Second, mainstream media. Media outlets have a social responsibility within the communities they report in and need to work hand-in-hand with local authorities and public health organizations to ensure accurate and factual reporting on vaccine efficacy and safety. The pace of information dissemination is also crucial so that the correct reporting reaches the public before the gaps are filled by false or misleading information.

Third, local governments. Governments need to be transparent and accountable as well as deliver information and address misconceptions rapidly around vaccination in order to overcome fear and mistrust. Accurate and transparent information around the role of vaccination can further motivate the adult population to take up vaccination.

Fourth, community groups – one of the most important groups for me are community groups. For example, small neighborhoods and communities, especially in rural areas, whose members are close-knit. A group such as this can positively influence one another in the spirit of the community and are the foundation to the larger environment around vaccine confidence. Locally driven education and awareness campaigns are a great place to start.

Fifth, public health professionals. As public health professionals, we also need to be able to tell more compelling stories around the importance of vaccination. We need to be able to use more diverse platforms and compelling messages instead of just science, data, charts and graphs.

The majority of the public are undecided and on the fence when it comes to getting vaccinated, so this is the most important group that we need to reach out to. To increase vaccine confidence, first, there is a need to win the hearts and minds of the people, which will then help overcome confusion and distrust.

At the end of the day, focusing on primary care and prevention is the key to ensuring a robust, resilient and sustainable healthcare system.

Dating apps offer path to quarantine romance

People seek connections, intimacy online in pandemic

Gisela Swaragita

The Jakarta Post

The need for intimacy still occupies people's minds during the pandemic. All around the world, people are seeking ways to be and feel together under quarantine, and dating applications offer a chance at new romance.

Bogor resident Dilla, 23, was not looking for a boyfriend when she signed up for a new Bumble account in June.

"I wanted to look for a pen pal who would be up for conversation via email because I was bored," Dilla told *The Jakarta Post* in early December.

Dilla said she set her search to the farthest location as she was unsure she would meet her matches in person because of the pandemic.

"I only put one photo on my profile and my bio said that I was searching for a pen pal only. With very little information on my behalf, the people who really wanted to be my pen pals would be filtered," she said. She also used an alias and set up a new email address for fear of her personal information being misused by her matches if they turned out to be insincere.

When she matched with a person, she texted him the email address to shift the conversation from the dating app. She made sure she didn't share any of her social media accounts to keep the conversation exclusively through email. To her surprise, she met someone that kept up with her email-only rule, one who was even eager to write her intensely every day.

"We really just wrote emails to each other for one month, every day. They range from two paragraphs to six to seven each day."

When conversation became more exciting, after a month Dilla decided to talk with her match through video call.

"We ended up chatting and singing online karaoke for seven hours!" Dilla said. "Afterward, we decided to upgrade from email to a chat platform and then decided to meet in person."

In August, the two became a couple. "Of course I was a bit scared be-

cause I found this guy on the internet but as it turned out this is the healthiest relationship I've ever been in," she said. The key, Dilla said, was communicating clearly and not to play mind games.

People craving intimacy while being in quarantine are also looking for creative gimmicks to meet new people on dating apps, which adds spice to interactions.

In its yearly recap, popular dating app Tinder said Indonesian users, especially but not limited to Gen Z, had become more creative in finding ways to socialize amid the pandemic, such as meeting virtually in the popular game Animal Crossing.

"When faced with new challenges like what happened this year, they are quick to adapt and become more creative in their socializing pattern using Tinder," Tinder wrote in a statement.

The app claimed that the use of chat features and the number of swipes in the third quarter of 2020 had increased significantly compared to February.

The recap reveals that the use of Tinder peaked on April 12. Users actively met with people from around the world through its Passport feature, which allows them to find matches from other countries such as South Korea, Japan and Singapore.

According to the recap, the use of words such as "mask", "work from home" and "wash your hands" increased significantly in the users' bio. More fun-related words such as "cycling", "TikTok", "Animal Crossing" and "Among Us" also increased.

Finding love during the pandemic is challenging but also very rewarding, Gibran (not his real name), a 29-year-old tech company employee in West Java's Depok, attests.

He matched with his current girlfriend, Selvi, (also not her real name), on a dating app in July and they began a committed relationship in September.

"I was at rock bottom earlier this year: I broke up with my then-girlfriend, my mother died, I had to take care of my mother's unfinished business and on top of it all I was paranoid about the coronavirus," he told the *Post*.

Gibran has used dating apps since 2013 to find girlfriends, sex partners or drinking pals, but since March his purpose was only to find someone new to talk to so he could distract his mind from wandering to dark places. Due to his pandemic fears, he braved himself to meet only one girl from the app.

"And now she's my girlfriend!" he said happily.

Gibran and Selvi bonded over their love for food. Selvi owns a rice box business in South Jakarta while Gibran is a culinary enthusiast.

"I fell madly in love with her after I took her on a culinary trip to BSD [in Tangerang]. It was my first date since the pandemic, a new normal kind of date. We went out from the morning, ate our way through Alam Sutera to BSD, visited the BSD city park and had fun seeing locals catching fish using rifles!" he said with a laugh.

"In the evening, I parked the car on an empty road to eat burgers. Turned out she ate burgers just like I did, she slipped the fries between the patty and the bun," Gibran said, his eyes shone in the glow of his happy memories. "I went home that night with butterflies in my tummy. I realized that it was the first time I had felt happy after months of constant bad luck. She reminded me of what it was like to be happy."

The deadly plague did not stop Iteung (not her real name), a 27-year-old graphic designer in Kemanggis, West Jakarta, from finding sex partners.

"I've used dating apps since 2015 exclusively for finding hook ups, not romantic partners," she said. At the height of the pandemic, she threw herself back into the dating pool after breaking up with her then-boyfriend and started actively meeting people after the first imposition of large-scale social restrictions (PSBB).

"I've met around six people so far and I felt like it was still safe because my activity was only limited to the house and with the people I hooked up with," she said.

To avoid meeting dubious people, she would do a thorough background check by asking around or Google the person. (wng)

Bad behavior



Antara/Syifa Yulianas

Several students sing the national anthem "Indonesia Raya" as a punishment for violating health protocols in Gampa village, West Aceh, Aceh, on Tuesday. Local authorities cracked down on health protocol violators to improve discipline during the pandemic. Most of the teenage violators were caught without a face mask.

Over 60s at far greater risk of COVID-19 death

The Jakarta Post

Jakarta

The national COVID-19 task force has conducted a study into the COVID-19 mortality risks based on age and comorbidity factors.

According to an analysis by a team of experts in the past five months, COVID-19 patients aged 31 to 45 had 2.4 times the mortality risk of those aged between 19 and 30, while people aged 46 to 59 were 8.5 times more at risk.

Task force spokesman Wiku Adisasmito said during a virtual press conference on Tuesday that the mortality risk was 19.5 times higher for COVID-19 patients aged 60 and above.

The research, which was published on PLOS One, also shows that COVID-19 patients with pre-existing kidney diseases have a 13.7 times higher mortality risk than patients without kidney diseases.

Wiku also noted other comorbidity factors that put COVID-19 patients at higher risk of death, including heart disease, diabetes mellitus and hypertension.

According to the study, the mortality risk of COVID-19 patients with heart diseases is nine times higher, while the mortality risks of patients with diabetes mellitus and hypertension is 8.3 and six times higher, respectively.

Wiku further explained that

COVID-19 patients with one comorbidity factor had a 6.5-fold higher mortality risk, while the risk for patients with two comorbidity factors was 15 times higher.

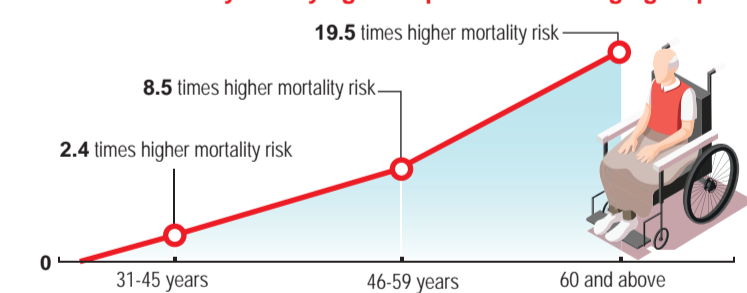
Wiku said the findings showed which groups should be prioritized.

"If you fall in a high-risk category or live with someone who does, then you need to implement strict health protocols," he said, referring to the 3M protocol of *menggunakan masker* (mask-wearing), *mencuci tangan* (handwashing) and *menjaga jarak* (physical distancing).

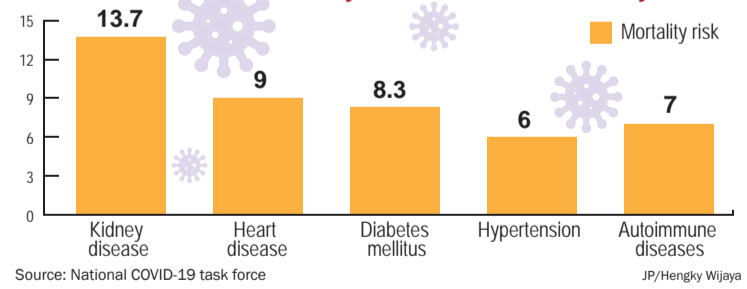
Previously, national COVID-19 task force chief Doni Monardo said 92 percent of COVID-19 patients in certain regions of the country had comorbidities, putting them at a high risk from the disease.

"Based on data in the past six months, up to 92 percent of patients in some regions have comorbidity factors, with diabetes being the most common one," he said during a public discussion on Sept. 16, as quoted by *kompas.com*. (jes)

COVID-19 mortality risk by age compared to 19-30 age group



Increase in COVID-19 mortality risk based on comorbidity factors



Source: National COVID-19 task force

JP/Hengry Wijaya

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