

April 22, 2021

The Editor
The Economist

Dear Editor,

Your article “A patriotic jab, or one that works better” (April 17, 2021) sadly and cynically seeks to politicise Hong Kong’s COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Your article raises questions about Sinovac, which has not published its Phase 3 clinical trial data in peer-reviewed journals. As we have emphasised repeatedly, the vaccine fulfils the criteria of safety, efficacy and quality and has been recommended for emergency use by an independent Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines comprising leaders in the fields of public health, infectious disease, immunology, drug regulation and clinical care. The Advisory Panel thoroughly deliberated the Phase 1 and Phase 2 clinical data submitted by the manufacturer to the World Health Organization, as well as the Phase 3 clinical information of trials in Brazil, Turkey and Indonesia, before coming to its conclusion that the benefits of using the vaccine for protection against COVID-19 outweigh any possible risks. The stringent and objective assessment by the Advisory Panel is on par with the peer review process of academic journals. While the efficacy of Sinovac is 50%-plus for infections requiring no clinical intervention, its efficacy is 83.7% for groups which experienced symptoms requiring medical treatment or with more severe conditions, and 100% for severe cases. The Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation has found no evidence that links the death of Sinovac recipients to their immunisation.

We take great exception to the view expressed by an anonymous “public-health scientist” that some people “were coerced” into taking Sinovac. People in Hong Kong have complete freedom to choose from the two vaccines that have been made available free of charge by the government. The Sinovac and BioNTech vaccines are equally available to the public. Vaccination and booking

statistics, with a breakdown by vaccine, are published daily through press releases and on the government's COVID-19 website. By April 21, over 10% of our population had taken the first dose of either vaccine. Some 1.17 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered, including 389,100 first doses of Sinovac and 384,900 of BioNTech.

At a time when the world should be joining hands to fight the pandemic, it is very disappointing that the biased and misleading information in your article could erode public confidence in the vaccination programme. Let's keep politics out of public health as the world battles a menacing pandemic that has taken over three millions of lives.

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