



WORKER REPORTED VIEWS ON COVID-19 VACCINES: THAILAND

JULY 2021

The purpose of this guidance note is to provide additional information on worker-reported concerns during the ongoing pandemic, and more specifically related to the ongoing wave in Thailand and vaccination plans. Having a clearer view of worker reported views about vaccines – their deployment, potential affects, pressure to get a vaccine or lose employment – can help employers, government and civil society communicate with and respond to workers.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The Royal Thai Government’s Social Security Office (SSO) has closely coordinated with employers throughout Thailand to survey and register sites and workers for COVID-19 vaccines. There are plans to offer AstraZeneca or Sinovac vaccines to migrant workers (other vaccines are currently only available privately for a fee), and some of these are rolling out now. Despite this, many workers receive negative and contradictory information on vaccines, and many are hesitant to commit to getting the vaccine. Although employers are moving forward with vaccination campaigns and plans (some reported to be starting in July), additional communication and moves to address worker concerns will make these efforts more successful for everyone.

Issara Institute regularly communicates with and reaches hundreds of thousands of workers in Thailand, and works closely with employers as well. Our worker voice channels are currently receiving many inquiries about vaccine safety, in addition to grievances about poor quarantine or COVID response protocols by employers and government (including denial of benefits such as paid leave during quarantine or in the case of a factory/employer shut down). In June, Issara released *Guidance for Thai Companies: Care of Workers Affected by COVID-19* to complement other useful guidance and streamline actionable recommendations for day to day operations of employers. We additionally released communications and videos about COVID-19 vaccines for workers, and based on worker responses we conducted focus groups with 24 migrant workers in the seafood and garment industries, and online polls with 124 workers to explore concerns raised about vaccine safety.

Workers are primarily concerned with vaccine safety and side effects, and particularly have concerns about the Chinese-developed Sinovac vaccines based on information they receive from other workers, news, and social media. They report receiving little detailed information on vaccines and vaccination plans from their employers, and that clear communication products and dialogue sessions could help alleviate worker concerns and combat a large amount of negative information in the press and social

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media on vaccine safety and side effects. During the discussions, it was clear that workers able to discuss their concerns and hear clear information regarding vaccines are more likely to feel comfortable being vaccinated, but many still hold concerns about side effects and ways their employer is communicating about and responding to the current outbreak in Thailand and vaccine plans.

WORKER RECOMMENDATIONS

As the workers participating in discussions are familiar with Issara Institute and ways we support workers and employers, workers suggested that Issara coordinate with employers on clear posting and dissemination of information in local languages, and support discussion sessions where possible.

- Provide more information such as the name of vaccine, where it was produced, suggested remedies for mild side-effects, care and compensation for those with serious side-effects, and do's and don'ts before vaccination
- Announce a clear vaccination plan and what considerations there are for those who are not able to be vaccinated
- Explain clearly about the pros and cons of vaccination and the list of medicines allowable for possible side-effects, and how workers requiring medical care will be supported
- Arrange discussion sessions with workers and answer the questions raised so that workers can trust the information being provided to them and reduce their worries
- For current and future quarantine facilities, ensure proper facilities with adequate space, fans, bedding and other necessary materials (do not make workers bring or buy these items). Provide different kinds of meals for the workers in quarantine and other necessary support since the workers cannot go to the market while in quarantine

Q&A WITH WORKERS

1. **Where do you usually hear about or search for information about COVID-19 vaccines? How can you check if those are reliable sources?** Workers at garment factories have been provided basic information, and pros & cons together with the vaccination plan. It is helpful for workers to receive the information not only from the news and social media but also from their employers. Other workers seek information from social media and word of mouth.
2. **Do you usually see bad news or good news about vaccines?** Many workers hear negative news from social media and rumors that several Thai citizens have died after receiving vaccine injections. This news makes them consider refusing the vaccine and makes it difficult to make a decision. On the other hand, positive information is coming based on the actual results of vaccination from their supervisors, HR staff, colleagues and workers from neighboring factories.

3. **What do you see as the benefits or risks of getting the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Benefits: If there are additional infections or outbreaks at the factory, the people who have already been vaccinated will be less at risk. Workers understand that protocols such as wearing masks will still be necessary. If they are infected, they won't suffer very seriously. The reported side effects of taking the vaccine are not very severe and just muscle pain especially in young workers.

Risks: According to the news, there can be serious side effects and even death, particularly for older workers. Even though some workers understand the need and benefits of being vaccinated, they are concerned that they will have severe side effects.

4. **Do you have any concerns regarding vaccines? Or do you know of concerns others might have?**

Workers are concerned about being vaccinated because of the lack of information about compensation for severe side effects, and a lack of detailed information provided by their employers. Many workers say they do not want to get the Chinese-developed Sinovac vaccine, mainly due to a distrust from it coming from China. At the same time, some workers are open to any vaccine if the employer clearly explains about the vaccine such as the country it was produced in, prevention effectiveness, and the compensation plan for any effects or needed sick leave.

5. **Would you choose to be vaccinated? Why or why not?** Over half of the participants are willing to be vaccinated now, because they think the person who has already received the vaccine can protect themselves from infection and the risks of severe effects from COVID-19. These workers are also motivated to receive a vaccine because their employers informed them that they are not allowed to take public transportation, go shopping, and have other social movements if they are not vaccinated.

However, some workers still plan to refuse to be vaccinated because they are worried about the risk of severe side effects or death. A few workers still want to see the results from those who are vaccinated and the types of vaccine that will be offered.

6. **If you could choose which vaccine to get, which would you choose (Astra-Zeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer, Sinovac, or Sinopharm)?** All workers prefer to not get Chinese vaccines because of the distrust of Chinese products. Some workers are worried that migrant workers will be provided substandard vaccines, unlike the vaccine taken by Thai citizens. A worker shared that she might have to accept Sinovac without a chance to choose because the type of vaccine is provided based on age. A community poll from Issara's Burmese Facebook also shows that 60% workers will decide to be vaccinated depending on the type of vaccine, 20% of workers will decline to be vaccinated, 11% of workers will take vaccination regardless of which one is offered, 6.5% of workers will take vaccination only if their employment is impacted, and 2.5% cannot decide whether they should take the vaccine or not.