

2020/21 seasonal influenza vaccination programmes to launch in October

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (August 24) announced that the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) and the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP) 2020/21 will be launched on October 8 and 22 respectively, providing in phases subsidised or free seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) and pneumococcal vaccination (PV) to eligible persons.

"Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications. To enhance the vaccination rate of schoolchildren and to assist in arranging outreach vaccination services by schools, the DH will continue its free outreach vaccination service in primary schools while the outreach service for kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres has been regularised in the new season," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Under the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge), a Public-Private-Partnership Team or a Government Outreach Team will provide free vaccination for schoolchildren in participating schools. So far, around 470 primary schools and 760 kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres have signed up for the programme. The outreach service for primary schools will start on October 22 while the service for kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres will begin on October 8.

The subsidy for the outreach service for kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres in the new season will be increased from \$260 to \$270 per dose (vaccines will be provided by participating doctors). As for the outreach service for primary schools, the subsidy will remain at \$100 per dose (vaccines will be provided by the DH). At present, around 140 doctors will participate to provide vaccination services under the programme.

Primary schools, kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres not participating in the programmes above are encouraged to arrange as early as possible outreach vaccination for their students through the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed). Schools can invite doctors providing outreach vaccination under the VSS from the list published on the CHP's website to arrange outreach SIV service at their campus, and the subsidy will be increased from \$210 to \$240 per dose in the new season. For eligible children who will not receive SIV in school outreach vaccination, parents can still arrange subsidised vaccination for their children in clinics of private doctors enrolled in the VSS.

The DH has already informed participating doctors about the arrangements for the VSS in the new season and also reminded them to make early

preparations and place vaccine orders in a timely manner.

Under the GVP (free vaccination) and the VSS (subsidised vaccination) in the new season, eligible groups for SIV will be extended to cover persons who are recipients of the standard rate of "100% disabled" or "requiring constant attendance" under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (see Annexes I and II). Regarding the VSS, the Government's subsidy for participating doctors will be increased from \$210 to \$240 per dose. In addition, under the Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme, the subsidy for visiting medical officers will remain at \$100 per dose.

The DH is now procuring a total of 628,000 doses of inactivated influenza vaccines (IIV) for the GVP, and 250,000 doses of IIV for school outreach programmes (free of charge) in the new season. Meanwhile, as of August 16, about 557,000 doses, 508,000 doses and 334,000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccines had been administered via the GVP, the VSS and school outreach programmes (free of charge) respectively in 2019/20. The total number of doses administered by the above programmes in 2019/20 was about 1,399,000 doses, representing an increase of about 16.9 per cent from the figures for the same period in the 2018/19 season.

Separately, the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the CHP has advised that the composition of the recommended vaccines for the 2020-21 influenza season should be in line with the World Health Organization's latest recommendations. The quadrivalent influenza vaccines to be used in the 2020-21 northern hemisphere influenza season contain:

- * A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- * A/Hong Kong/2671/2019(H3N2)-like virus
- * B/Washington/02/2019-like virus
- * B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus

Both IIV and live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) (i.e. nasal vaccine) are recommended for use in Hong Kong by the SCVPD. Depending on individual brands, most IIVs are recommended for use among people aged 6 months or older, including those who are healthy, pregnant women and those with chronic medical problems. LAIV can be used for people aged 2 to 49 except those who are pregnant, are immunocompromised or have other contraindications. Details can be found in the [SCVPD recommendations](#).

"Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. Given that influenza vaccines are safe and effective, all persons aged 6 months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive SIV for personal protection. Based on past epidemiological patterns, the winter influenza season usually starts in early January. However, the exact time of arrival cannot be predicted. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public are advised to receive SIV early for protection against seasonal influenza," the spokesman stressed.

Meanwhile, free/subsidised PV for eligible persons will continue to be provided under the GVP and the VSS to prevent pneumococcal infections (see Annex III). Those aged 65 or above who do not have high-risk conditions will be eligible for one dose of 23-valent polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccination (23vPPV). Elderly persons with high-risk conditions who have not received PV before will be eligible for one dose of 13-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and one dose of 23vPPV one year later. Under the VSS, the subsidy will be \$300 per dose for 23vPPV and \$760 per dose for PCV13.

The CHP has been organising meetings and briefings with relevant stakeholders including health care providers, community partners and the education sector to inform them of the vaccination arrangements for the new season and encourage their active participation in the vaccination programmes. Publicity has also been stepped up to promote SIV among members of the public.

The public may call the CHP's telephone number (2125 2125) or visit the [CHP's Vaccination Schemes page](#) for more details of the vaccination programmes.