

DH to launch one-off mop-up programme for measles vaccination

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (July 12) announced that as a public health strategy to prevent and control measles, a one-off mop-up programme will be launched to provide free measles vaccination to specific target groups with the aim of boosting the community's herd immunity against measles.

"The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the CHP has earlier formulated the guiding principles for measles vaccination of non-immune adults. The mop-up exercise is launched making reference to the guiding principles by the SCVPD," a spokesman for the DH said.

"Under the Measles Vaccination Mop-up Programme 2019, measles vaccination will be provided free of charge to three target groups, namely healthcare workers, airport staff and foreign domestic helpers working in Hong Kong."

Taking into account the experience of the measles outbreak at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) between March and May this year as well as the global situation regarding measles outbreak, the DH has procured additional measles vaccines to enhance the community's immunity against measles and ensure a steady supply of measles vaccines for the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme. Taking reference from the SCVPD's latest guiding principles and previous vaccination recommendation for healthcare workers, the DH expects that the one-off measles vaccination mop-up exercise will further boost Hong Kong's herd immunity after achieving measles elimination as verified by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Specifically, for healthcare workers and airport staff, the DH will continue to work closely with the Hospital Authority (HA) and Airport Authority in accordance with the mechanism established during the earlier measles outbreak at HKIA, and provide measles vaccination to the healthcare workers (including those working in the DH, other government departments and the HA) and airport staff who are non-immune to measles. The mop-up programme also covers healthcare workers at private hospitals. As for the provision of measles vaccination to foreign domestic helpers working in Hong Kong, the DH has been liaising with relevant consulate offices and organisations on the arrangements.

The Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccines to be used in the mop-up programme were additionally procured by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government this April from one of the suppliers of registered MMR vaccines in Hong Kong, Merck Sharp & Dohme (Asia) Ltd (MSD). These vaccines were allocated to the Hong Kong market from other markets amid tight supply for MMR vaccines around the world. Although they were manufactured by the same manufacturer with the same master formula and finished product

specifications as the MMR vaccine registered by MSD in Hong Kong, the packing of these vaccines is labelled in Spanish.

The SCVPD in an earlier meeting formulated the following three guiding principles after reviewing the latest global and local situation of measles, population immunity profile, the WHO's recommendations and overseas practices:

- i. All adults (especially non-local born) who are non-immune to measles are advised to receive MMR vaccination for personal protection and maintenance of high herd immunity in the community;
- ii. Special attention should be paid to international travellers and foreign domestic helpers (especially Filipino domestic helpers working in Hong Kong). They are considered to have a relatively higher risk of acquiring measles based on the local epidemiology of measles in the past few years; and
- iii. Foreign-born adults newly arrived in Hong Kong for residence, work or study should review their immune status and receive measles vaccination if they are non-immune, preferably before arrival in Hong Kong.

As measles was endemic in Hong Kong and most parts of the world before 1967, people born before 1967 are considered to have acquired immunity to measles through natural infection. For persons born in 1967 or after, they can be considered to be non-immune to measles and hence are advised to receive MMR vaccination if they fulfil all the following three criteria:

- i. did not have laboratory evidence of immunity (i.e. no laboratory test ever done or tested negative/indeterminate for measles immunoglobulin G);
- ii. did not have laboratory confirmed measles infection in the past; and
- iii. have never been vaccinated with two doses of measles-containing vaccine or have unknown vaccination status.

Regarding the schedule, non-immune adults who had no history of receiving any measles-containing vaccine or with unknown vaccination history are advised to receive two doses at least four weeks apart. Only one dose is required for those who had already received one dose of measles vaccination in the past.

A consensus summary of the SCVPD's guiding principles has been uploaded to the webpage of the SCVPD (www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24008.html).