

DH urges unvaccinated people to take immediate actions as influenza activity remains elevated

The Controller of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui, today (February 14) reminded members of the public that the seasonal influenza activity in Hong Kong remains at a high level, and the influenza season will continue for some time. All sectors of the community should remain vigilant and enhance personal hygiene and protection measures against influenza. All persons aged 6 months and above (except those with known contraindications) who have not yet received the seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) should act immediately to protect their health and that of their family members.

According to the CHP's latest surveillance data, in the week ending February 8, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses is 10.23 per cent. The influenza admission rate in public hospitals is 0.67 cases per 10 000 population, indicating that the overall influenza activity remains at a high level.

"Hong Kong entered the influenza season in early January this year, and it is now the sixth week. The Influenza A (H1) virus is predominant this season, accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the subtyped influenza virus detections. In terms of severe or death cases caused by influenza, this season, as in the past, mainly affects the elderly and young children," Dr Tsui said.

As of February 12, the CHP recorded 301 severe or death cases among adult patients. About 70 per cent of them have not received SIV of this season, and about 70 per cent of them have chronic diseases. Among the 186 death cases, about 90 per cent of them were aged 65 or above. For children, nine cases of severe influenza-associated complications were recorded this season. Seven (including two preschool children and five school children) of them had not received SIV of this season, and two cases had chronic diseases.

"The number of severe or death cases recorded in the first five weeks of this season is higher than that of the same period last season, but similar to the 2018/19 influenza season, i.e. before the COVID-19 pandemic, which was also dominated by influenza A (H1). Based on historical data, the entire influenza season usually lasts for two to four months. Whether it will last for 28 weeks, as in the past influenza season, will depend on any change in the circulating strains of viruses, including any increase in the activities of influenza A (H3) and influenza B viruses," Dr Tsui said.

He pointed out that, according to the virus analysis conducted by the CHP, the strains of influenza viruses that are circulating in Hong Kong nowadays are similar to the strains of viruses in the seasonal influenza

vaccine currently available in Hong Kong, which means that the vaccine is effective in lowering the risk of serious complications or death from the infection. Data analysis also showed that the rate of serious complications in residents of residential care homes for the elderly who did not receive SIV was 2.2 times that of vaccinated residents, highlighting the protective effect of SIV.

As of February 9, a total of about 1 975 100 doses of vaccines were administered under various vaccination programmes, an increase of about 8.4 per cent over the same period in the last SIV season and a record high, surpassing the total number of doses administered under various vaccination programmes in the year 2023/24 (i.e. about 1 873 000 doses).

The number of schools participating in the SIV School Outreach Programme has also increased significantly this year. About 1 020 kindergartens/child care centres (97 per cent), about 640 primary schools (98 per cent) and about 490 secondary schools (98 per cent) have completed or are arranging SIV school outreach activities. This is higher than the participation rate in year 2023/24, i.e. 80 per cent of kindergartens/child care centres, 95 per cent of primary schools and 70 per cent of secondary schools.

"The SIV coverage rate for children aged 6 months to under 2 years remains relatively low at about 22.5 per cent. Although slightly higher than that of the same period in the last SIV season, the coverage rate was still lower than that of other age groups of children. To enhance relevant vaccination services and boost the vaccination rate, the Government has opened the DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) to all children aged 6 months to under 2 years. For the sake of the children's health, parents are advised to make appointments via the online booking system as soon as possible for children aged 6 months to under 2 years who have not yet received SIV to be vaccinated at the designated MCHCs," Dr Tsui said.

He also reminded parents not to believe in alternative therapies circulating on the Internet that claim to prevent and cure influenza in infants and young children. There is no scientific evidence to support such claims. SIV is one of the most effective ways to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications, while significantly reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death from seasonal influenza for infants and young children. Children who develop symptoms of respiratory infection, even if mild, should consult a doctor as soon as possible to avoid any delay in management.

For the more information, members of the public are welcome to visit the CHP's [seasonal influenza](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) webpages.