

# Hospital Authority commences seasonal influenza vaccination programme

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) will commence providing seasonal influenza vaccination in public hospitals and out-patient clinics in phases to eligible persons from tomorrow (October 5) to dovetail with the Government Vaccination Programme 2023/24.

The seasonal influenza vaccination programme this year will be carried out in three phases. In the first phase, the HA will provide seasonal influenza vaccination to eligible patients (Annex I). Eligible patients may receive vaccination during their scheduled follow-up appointments at the clinics. Patients who have not had a follow-up appointment recently may visit or contact respective clinics to arrange for vaccination (Annex II).

The second phase of the programme, extending to elderly people aged 65 or above, will commence on October 24. They can receive vaccination at general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) without prior appointment. Poultry workers, pig farmers and people who are involved in poultry culling operations or the pig-slaughtering industry, as referred by relevant government departments, can receive seasonal influenza vaccination in selected GOPCs under the third phase of the programme starting from October 30.

The Chairperson of the HA Coordinating Committee in Family Medicine, Dr Wendy Tsui, appealed to members of the public to receive seasonal influenza vaccination as early as possible. She said, "The overall seasonal influenza activity in Hong Kong remains at a high level since entering the summer influenza season. As winter is approaching, the risk of influenza transmission may increase. However, the immune response level to influenza in the overall population is low, which may lead to a potential influenza outbreak, with additional burdens on vulnerable population and health system."

Dr Tsui added that receiving seasonal influenza vaccination can greatly reduce the risk of death and serious illness from infection. Immunity will develop in about two to four weeks after inoculation and will last for at least six months. It is usually well tolerated apart from occasional soreness or swelling at the injection site.

For making a more flexible staffing arrangement so as to take care of patients with episodic illnesses, the HA will cancel the COVID-19 protected quotas reserved at GOPCs starting from this Friday (October 6). The manpower and consultation quotas will be reallocated to enhance services for patients with influenza, COVID-19 and other episodic illness. The "BookCOVID" function of the "HA GO" mobile app will be suspended on the same day.

Dr Tsui said, "Hong Kong is about to enter winter. Elderly people or patients with chronic diseases may suffer from physical discomfort or episodic illnesses due to seasonal changes. The HA will closely monitor the service demand and will mobilise resources to strengthen services when necessary. The HA also appeals to the public to pay special attention to their own health conditions, receive seasonal influenza vaccination as soon as possible, and seek early consultation when they feel unwell."

Members of the public can enquire about the details of this year's seasonal influenza vaccination programme at respective specialist out-patient clinics or GOPCs they are attending, or make enquiries on the HA hotline at 2300 6555 during office hours.