

Public hospitals prepare for winter service surge

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As the temperature drops gradually, public hospitals are anticipating the challenges from the winter service surge and COVID-19 simultaneously. The Hospital Authority (HA) will launch a series of response measures tomorrow (December 1) to cope with the increase in demand for Accident and Emergency (A&E) Departments and inpatient services. Meanwhile, the HA appeals to members of the public to get vaccinated early for seasonal flu and COVID-19, to reduce their and their family's risk of being infected.

The HA Chief Manager (Cluster Performance), Dr Michael Wong, said that the HA has allocated over \$700 million to all clusters to arrange facilities and manpower for preparedness, in order to enhance service for patients during the service surge. "Public hospitals have reserved resources for opening temporary beds, and planning for manpower, such as encouraging and facilitating healthcare staff to join the Special Honorarium Scheme, and the ongoing recruitment of locum and part-time healthcare staff."

Dr Wong stressed that the HA will strengthen its gate-keeping to lessen unnecessary hospital admissions. The Emergency Operation Command is able to mobilise facilities and resources at any time to cope with rising service demand. Hospitals will continue to reinforce laboratory services, ward rounds of clinicians, supporting service for hospital discharge and transfer; geriatrics support to A&E, as well as night shift nursing and supporting staff manpower in order to enhance patient service.

Community support is also very important during a service surge. Dr Wong said that the HA will keep collaborating with private hospitals by transferring suitable patients for treatment, and maintain other Public-Private Partnership Programmes.

Dr Wong also appealed to the public for their understanding and co-operation. Non-urgent patients are advised to avoid using A&E Departments and to seek consultation at general out-patient clinics (GOPC), private doctors or the 24-hour clinics of private hospitals. To choose a suitable family doctor and related clinic service, members of the public are welcome to browse the Primary Care Directory of the Food and Health Bureau at www.pcdirectory.gov.hk.

"General out-patient clinics service will be enhanced by an addition of 18 000 service quotas, including around 3 500 quotas during the long holidays. More clinics will provide service during Christmas, Chinese New Year and Easter long holidays, to cover more districts," Dr Wong added.

To facilitate public understanding of the public hospital service

situation during the winter surge, the HA will display key service statistics, A&E waiting times and medical consultation information at the designated website www.ha.org.hk/goto/wintersurge/en and in "Service Surge Online" on the "HA Go" mobile application from tomorrow onwards.