

Public urged to receive seasonal influenza vaccination early

The Government today (March 21) urged members of the public, especially the elderly and children, to receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) as early as practicable for personal protection.

"The local seasonal influenza activity has been staying at low levels over the past three years, so the immunity against influenza in the local community as a whole may be relatively weaker than in the past. We also observed elevated influenza activity in some countries or areas of the northern hemisphere in the past few months, and some have even reached peak season. Given that members of the public do not need to wear a mask mandatorily since March 1 this year, the risk for influenza transmission will become higher and members of the public should not lower their guard. As of March 19, about 1.5 million doses of SIV had been administered via the Government Vaccination Programme and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS), representing a roughly 23 per cent rise over the same period in 2021/22 season. The influenza vaccination coverage rate for the elderly aged 65 or above has reached 47 per cent. While the vaccination coverage rate for children below 18 years of age is almost 40 per cent, that for toddlers aged 6 months to below 2 years is around 8 per cent only. Parents are urged to arrange vaccination for their children as early as possible to reduce the risk of falling seriously ill should they get infected. The Government strongly appeals to members of the public, especially the elderly and children, to receive influenza vaccination early," a Government spokesman said.

SIV is one of the effective means to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications, as well as reduce influenza-related hospitalisation and death. All persons aged 6 months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive SIV for personal protection. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public, particularly persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive SIV early.

Those aged 6 to 48 months may continue to choose to receive both COVID-19 vaccination and free SIV at designated Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) under the Department of Health (DH) when a reservation is made for them online. Staff of MCHCs will proactively call the parents and during their consultation session at MCHCs explain to them information on COVID-19 vaccination and SIV. By answering parents' queries on vaccination and eliminating their misunderstandings or worries, they will be encouraged to arrange vaccination for their children.

Currently, Hong Kong residents aged 50 or above may choose to receive both COVID-19 vaccination and free SIV at Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs). To encourage and facilitate children in getting SIV, from March 22 onwards, Hong Kong residents aged between 6 months and below 18 years may

choose to receive free SIV on-site when they are receiving the COVID-19 vaccination at CVCs. They can also make reservations for receiving both COVID-19 vaccination and SIV through the booking system of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk) starting from 9am on March 22.

Meanwhile, to facilitate parents to keep their children's vaccination records as lifelong personal medical records, the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (eHRSS) has gradually covered the records of vaccinations under the Government's VSS, including COVID-19 vaccination records, records under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme as stored in the system of the DH, and SIV records which will start to be included in the eHRSS from this quarter onwards. Parents can access their children's vaccination records via the eHealth mobile app.

The spokesman reminded members of the public that currently various vaccination venues provide co-administration of COVID-19 vaccine and SIV to eligible persons. The venues include the designated facilities under the Hospital Authority and the DH, CVCs and Private Clinic COVID-19 Vaccination Stations. Details on eligible persons are available at www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106096.html.

The public may call the hotline (2125 2125) or visit the Vaccination Schemes page (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/17980.html) for more information on various SIV schemes.