

Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases issues recommendations on seasonal influenza vaccination for 2022-23 season in Hong Kong

The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (April 25) issued the recommendations on seasonal influenza vaccination for the forthcoming 2022-23 influenza season in Hong Kong, after reviewing the scientific evidence, local data and overseas practices.

The SCVPD noted that the seasonal influenza activity in Hong Kong remained at a low level since mid-February 2020 and the influenza transmission may have been altered by the range of non-pharmaceutical interventions in place for COVID-19 or travel restrictions or border closures. However, influenza transmission could increase when these control measures are lifted, leading to potential co-circulation of influenza and SARS-CoV-2, with additional burdens on vulnerable populations and health systems.

There is increasing evidence suggesting that co-infection of COVID-19 and influenza increases morbidity and mortality, and influenza vaccination might reduce the likelihood of hospitalisation and the length of stay. Given that seasonal influenza vaccine offers protection against clinical influenza and severe cases do occur in previously healthy persons, all members of the public, except those with known contraindications, should receive seasonal influenza vaccine annually for personal protection.

The SCVPD recommended that the priority groups for receiving the seasonal influenza vaccine to be the same as in last season. The SCVPD opined that as the risk groups of COVID-19 and influenza are similar, it is important to ensure that people who are at greater risk of influenza infection (e.g. health workers, older adults, children and pregnant women) are prioritised to receive seasonal influenza vaccination. On the other hand, flexibility could be exercised to provide COVID-19 vaccines with seasonal influenza vaccine on the same visit under informed consent for administrative convenience and achieving better coverage. The same principle would also apply to similar settings including residential care homes.

Moreover, the SCVPD recommended that the composition of the seasonal influenza vaccines for the upcoming 2022-23 season should follow the World Health Organization's recommendations for the 2022-23 Northern Hemisphere influenza season.

Details of the SCVPD's recommendation are available on CHP's website at www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24008.html.