

World Immunization Week promotes use of vaccines

The Department of Health (DH) reminded the public today (April 25) that the use of vaccines can protect people of all ages against vaccine preventable diseases, to tie in with World Immunization Week, a global initiative organised by the World Health Organization in the last week of April.

A spokesman for the DH said, "World Immunization Week 2022, under the theme '#Long Life for All', promotes the idea that vaccines make it possible for us to pursue our dreams, protect our loved ones and live a long, healthy life. Vaccines provide important health benefits from the early stage of life to ensure that children can have long lives and grow into healthy adults."

Immunisation is recognised as one of the most successful, safe and cost-effective public health interventions and protects millions of people each year globally from serious and often deadly diseases including measles, hepatitis B and even some forms of cancer.

In Hong Kong, with the long-established childhood immunisation programme, polio was eradicated locally in 2000 after global smallpox eradication in 1980, while measles and rubella were declared eliminated in 2016 and 2021 respectively.

As recommended by the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH, children from birth to Primary Six should receive different types of vaccines and boosters under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme to protect them from tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, hepatitis B, diphtheria, whooping cough (pertussis), tetanus, pneumococcal infection, chickenpox, measles, mumps and rubella. To prevent cervical cancer, eligible female primary school students are provided with human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine under the programme.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, immunisation services for infants and children in the DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres are continuing as usual. Vaccination at primary schools will be arranged by the DH's School Immunisation Teams at schools or arrangements will be made for students to receive vaccination at branches. As delays in vaccination will weaken the protection for children against relevant infectious diseases, parents are reminded to maintain up-to-date vaccination for their children for timely protection against infectious diseases.

Vaccination is a top priority in the Government's anti-COVID-19 measures. A territory-wide COVID-19 Vaccination Programme has been launched. In addition to personal protection, parents and carers should consider receiving COVID-19 vaccination in order to protect children who cannot yet receive COVID-19 vaccines.

Moreover, taking reference from the earlier recommendation of the SCVPD and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases under the CHP of the DH joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel, flexibility could be exercised by allowing provision of COVID-19 vaccines with seasonal influenza vaccine or other childhood immunisation vaccines during the same visit for vaccination under informed consent for convenience and achieving better coverage.