

2021/22 seasonal influenza vaccination programmes to start this Wednesday

With the launch of the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP) 2021/22 this Wednesday (October 6), the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (October 4) said that a steady supply of seasonal influenza vaccines will be ensured under the programme and appealed to eligible persons to receive free seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) to better protect themselves in the coming winter influenza season.

There is increasing evidence suggesting that a person who gets influenza and COVID-19 at the same time may be more seriously ill and would have a higher risk of death, and influenza vaccination may reduce the likelihood of hospitalisation and the length of stay. It is important to receive both SIV and COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible, in particular for elderly persons residing in the community or residential care homes. Elderly people who are fit for SIV are fit for COVID-19 vaccination. Elderly persons should receive COVID-19 vaccination early as long as they are not suffering from acute illnesses. It is recommended to have an interval of at least 14 days between administration of seasonal influenza vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines (Comirnaty or CoronaVac).

Starting this Wednesday, the GVP will in phases provide free influenza vaccination for Hong Kong residents in the following eligible groups through designated public clinics

(www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/202122_gvp_provisional_table_eng.pdf):

- Pregnant women who are Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients or Certificate for Waiver of Medical Charges (Certificate) holders can receive vaccination in Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) of the DH or Antenatal Clinics of the Hospital Authority (HA);
- Children aged 6 months to under 12 years receiving CSSA or holding the Certificate can receive vaccination in MCHCs (6 months to under 6 years) and Student Health Service Centres of the DH (6 years to under 12 years). The Student Health Service's telephone line (2856 9133) offers a booking service for eligible primary school children;
- Elderly persons aged 65 or above attending public clinics, persons who are CSSA recipients or Certificate holders aged 50 to under 65 and those aged below 50 with chronic medical problems, eligible in-patients (including paediatric patients) of the HA and eligible paediatric out-patients, and eligible persons with intellectual disabilities and community-living persons receiving Disability Allowance can receive vaccination during their follow-up or stays in public clinics/hospitals;
- Residents of homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities as well as residential child care centres, public/institutional healthcare workers, poultry workers and pig farmers can also receive vaccination through arrangements by their residential care homes or work units; and

- Persons who are recipients of the standard rate of "100% disabled" or "requiring constant attendance" under the CSSA Scheme.

Further to the above, community-living elderly persons aged 65 or above can get vaccinated at designated Elderly Health Centres of the DH starting from November 1 and at general out-patient clinics of the HA from November 8.

Under the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge), the Government will arrange for a Public-Private-Partnership Team or a Government Outreach Team to provide free vaccination for schoolchildren in participating schools. The outreach service for kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres will start on October 6 while the service for primary schools will start on October 13.

The DH has already procured seasonal influenza vaccines for the programmes and will maintain close liaison with vaccine suppliers to ensure a steady supply for the Government.

In addition, the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) will also be launched this Wednesday. Eligible groups of Hong Kong residents (including persons aged 50 years or above, pregnant women, children aged 6 months to less than 12 years (or primary school students), persons with intellectual disabilities, persons receiving Disability Allowance and recipients of the standard rate of "100% disabled" or "requiring constant attendance" under the CSSA Scheme can receive subsidised influenza vaccination at clinics of private doctors enrolled in the Scheme. Please visit the eHealth System (Subsidies) website (apps.hcv.gov.hk/Public/en/SPS/Search) for the list of doctors.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. Given that influenza vaccines are safe and effective, all persons aged 6 months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive SIV for personal protection. Based on past epidemiological patterns, the winter influenza season usually starts in January. However, the exact time of arrival cannot be predicted. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public are advised to receive SIV in a timely manner for protection against seasonal influenza."

Apart from vaccination, effective ways to prevent infection from seasonal influenza include maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene, in particular the proper use of surgical masks, performing hand hygiene at all times, maintaining a balanced diet, having regular exercise, not smoking and avoiding alcohol consumption (www.chp.gov.hk/en/resources/464/29.html).

Meanwhile, free/subsidised pneumococcal vaccination (PV) for eligible persons will continue to be provided under the GVP and the VSS to prevent pneumococcal infections. Those aged 65 or above who do not have high-risk conditions will be eligible for one dose of 23-valent polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccination (23vPPV). Elderly persons with high-risk conditions who have not received PV before will be eligible for one dose of a 13-valent

pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and one dose of 23vPPV one year later. It is recommended to have an interval of at least 14 days between administration of PV and COVID-19 vaccines (Comirnaty or CoronaVac).

The public, especially eligible groups, may call the CHP's telephone line (2125 2125) for enquiries during office hours or visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#) for more information.