

Announcement of latest arrangements on COVID-19 vaccination

The Government announced today (March 18) that starting from 8am on March 21, persons aged 18 to 59 who have already received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine can make appointments for the third dose three months after their second dose via the online booking system of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk). The system will simultaneously open to bookings by immunocompromised persons aged 12 or above for receiving an additional dose, i.e. the fourth dose, with a time interval of three months since the third dose. For details as well as the arrangements for other groups of persons making appointments for receiving the third dose, please refer to the press release on March 4 (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202203/04/P2022030400691.htm).

The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (JSC) under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) and the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel (EAP) earlier jointly recommended to shorten the time interval between COVID-19 vaccine doses. It also strongly recommended a third dose of the Fosun/BioNTech Comirnaty vaccine for adults who have received two doses of the Sinovac CoronaVac vaccine or the BioNTech vaccine as soon as three months after they had received their second dose. Under the existing priority arrangement, elderly people and teenagers can already receive the third dose with time intervals of three months and five months respectively since the second dose.

In addition, the JSC-EAP announced on March 13 the updated consensus interim recommendations (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202203/13/P2022031300312.htm) in respect of the use of COVID-19 vaccines for persons and children with previous infection.

Taking into account the expert recommendations, recovered persons who had not received two doses or more of a COVID-19 vaccine before infection can receive vaccination as soon as three months after recovery. To receive vaccination, they should go to vaccination venues with the recovery records, such as a discharge letter issued by a hospital; a text message, electronic record or paper certificate of a positive polymerase chain reaction test result issued by the Government or a recognised laboratory under the Laboratory Recognition Scheme of the DH; a text message or electronic record of a completed declaration of a positive rapid antigen test result on the Declaration System for Individuals Tested Positive for COVID-19 Using Rapid Antigen Test of the DH; an isolation order issued by the DH; or any other documents or records issued by the Government or the Hospital Authority pertaining to the recovered person status of an individual. Photos of positive rapid antigen test results are not accepted as valid recovery records. The Government is arranging to modify the online booking system having regard to the latest expert recommendations as well as the recovery records of individuals in the computer system with a view to further

facilitating online booking by persons who have recovered from COVID-19 later.

For recovered residents of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), those unvaccinated may receive their first dose one month after recovery and the second dose with a time interval of one month since their first dose at the earliest. If they had received one dose before infection, they may receive another dose three months after recovery. The visiting medical officers providing outreach vaccination service to RCHEs will make appropriate arrangements according to the updated consensus interim recommendations. As regards immunocompromised persons who have recovered from COVID-19, they should bring along the relevant medical certificate to the designated vaccination venues to verify their status for receiving vaccination.

A government spokesman said, "The current epidemic situation is still severe. Both COVID-19 vaccines available in Hong Kong are safe and highly effective in protecting against severe illness and death from COVID-19 infection. We strongly appeal for members of the public who are not yet vaccinated, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a much higher fatality risk after COVID-19 infection, to get vaccinated as early as possible for the sake of their health. Members of the public eligible for the third dose should also receive vaccination as soon as possible."