

Update on monitoring COVID-19 vaccination

In the preceding week till 11.59pm on August 14, the Department of Health (DH) received 17 reports (Note 1) of adverse events following COVID-19 immunisation. No death cases were reported by the Hospital Authority (HA) involving individuals who had received vaccines within 14 days before they passed away and had potential association with vaccination.

As at 8pm on August 14, around 18.29 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered for members of the public. Around 6.78 million people had received at least one dose of vaccine, including 94.2 per cent of the population aged 12 or above. The DH received 7 850 reports of adverse events (0.04 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered). Among the death cases concerning persons who had been vaccinated, including 119 cases (Note 2) with vaccination within 14 days before they passed away (0.0007 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered), none of the death cases were associated with vaccination.

As of today, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation had concluded that 97 death cases had no causal relationship with vaccination, while for one case the causal relationship with vaccination could not be established, and preliminarily considered that 11 cases were not associated with vaccination. Ten cases are still pending further information for assessment. The Expert Committee considered that there is no unusual pattern identified so far, and will continue to closely monitor the relevant situation and collect data for assessment.

According to information from the HA, during the period from July 18 to August 14, the overall ratio of death cases was 44.4 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the average ratio of death cases for the same period in 2018 to 2020 was 42.9 cases for every 100 000 people. Among these death cases, the ratio of death cases with acute stroke or acute myocardial infarction was 1.9 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the average ratio of death cases under the same category for the same period in 2018 to 2020 was 2.5 cases for every 100 000 people. Furthermore, the ratio of miscarriage cases was 14.3 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the average ratio of miscarriage cases for the same period in 2018 to 2020 was 20.8 cases for every 100 000 people. Based on the statistical analysis of the above figures, there is no evidence that vaccination increases the risk of death or miscarriage for recipients. The relevant reference statistics will be uploaded to the thematic website for the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

The majority of non-death cases of adverse events received so far are relatively minor cases. The relevant details can be found in the "Report on the Safety Monitoring of COVID-19 Vaccines in Hong Kong" (www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/do/en/doc/Safety_Monitoring_of_COVID-19_Vaccines_in_Hong_Kong.pdf).

A Government spokesman said, "The number of daily new cases in Hong Kong remains high at four-digit figures with an ongoing rising trend. The Hong Kong community must stay vigilant in combating the epidemic rebound. Deaths and severe cases involving children and elderly persons, who are our focus of protection in vaccination, have been recorded in the fifth wave of the epidemic. For elderly persons, the COVID-19 vaccination rate for the elderly aged 80 or above in Hong Kong is only around 70 per cent at present, meaning that around 30 per cent of the elderly in that age group are in a dangerous situation, which is alarming.

"According to preliminary data analysis, out of the cases reported in the fifth wave, over 95 per cent of the fatal cases are elderly people aged 60 or above, with the proportion of death and hospitalised cases being the highest in those aged 80 or above. Most of the deceased cases are unvaccinated persons. As compared to the Hong Kong overall population, those who have received three doses of vaccine account for a much lower proportion among reported cases, and an extremely low proportion among the hospitalised critical/serious and deceased cases. This demonstrates the effectiveness of three doses of vaccine in preventing infection, serious illness and fatality from COVID-19. Even with just the first dose of vaccine, the risk of death can be significantly reduced. The latest research data from the University of Hong Kong also shows that receiving three doses of either the Comirnaty or CoronaVac vaccine is highly effective for preventing severe cases and deaths with over 90 per cent effectiveness. Members of the public who are currently eligible for a third dose should get the third dose as soon as possible.

"We have already started providing the fourth vaccine dose some time ago to persons aged 60 or above who had received three doses of vaccine. In light of experts' latest advice, persons aged 50 to 59 who have received three doses of CoronaVac or Comirnaty vaccine may receive the fourth vaccine dose at least three months after their last dose. Separately, children aged from 6 months to 3 years may also receive the CoronaVac vaccine. We call on parents to arrange vaccination for their children as early as possible, thus enabling them to have early protection in the face of the threat posed by the highly transmissible mutant virus strains.

"In addition, the Government once again reminds members of the public that recovered persons who had been infected with COVID-19 should also get vaccinated in a timely manner. For the Vaccine Pass, the recovery record QR code is valid within 180 days (i.e. six months) from the date of recovery. Therefore, the recovery record QR codes of persons who recovered at the beginning of this year will gradually expire. At that time, the recovered person may need to receive one more dose of COVID-19 vaccine to comply with the Vaccine Pass, or update their vaccination records. Specifically, recovered persons who had not received or had only received one dose of vaccine are required to receive an additional dose (first or second dose) of vaccine before their recovery record QR codes expire, in order to continue to use the Vaccine Pass. As for recovered persons who had received two or more doses of vaccine, they should update their vaccination records through the Electronic Vaccination and Testing Record System (www.evt.gov.hk), the 'iAM Smart' or 'eHealth' mobile applications before their recovery record QR codes

expire, in order to continue to use the Vaccine Pass."

Note 1: Provisional figures. In the preceding week till 11.59pm on August 14, the DH did not receive any reports of suspected myocarditis or pericarditis involving adolescents in the age group of 3 to 15, and did not receive any reports of adverse events following COVID-19 immunisation for children aged under 3.

Note 2: In the preceding week till 11.59pm on August 14, the DH did not receive any reports involving individuals who had received COVID-19 vaccination within 14 days before passing away.

Government follows up on fatal work accident in Yau Ma Tei

The Government is very concerned about a fatal work accident that happened at Yaumatei Maternal and Child Health Centre on Monday afternoon (August 15). The Labour Department has launched an investigation to identify the cause of the accident and to ascertain the liability of the duty holders.

While the cause of the accident is yet to be established, relevant government departments will take follow-up action to inspect similar electric gates at all government premises to safeguard public safety and to ease concern.

A Government spokesman today (August 17) said, "The Architectural Services Department and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) today commenced inspection on similar large-scale electric sliding gates at government premises, in particular devices with a manual mode, to ensure that they can be safely operated manually, so as to prevent recurrence of similar accidents. The inspection is expected to be completed within two weeks. Other works departments including the Water Supplies Department, the Drainage Services Department, the Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Highways Department will also complete inspection of electric gates at their premises within a week."

The Hong Kong Housing Authority, the Hong Kong Housing Society, the Hospital Authority, the Urban Renewal Authority, the MTR Corporation and the Airport Authority Hong Kong will also carry out inspection on similar large-scale electric gates at their premises to ensure these gates are safe to be operated manually.

In addition, the Buildings Department will write to property management companies, urging them to carry out corresponding inspection of large-scale electric gates at the properties managed by them for the sake of public

safety.

According to "A Safety Guide on Gate Work" published by the Labour Department, a regular gate maintenance system for competent technical personnel to perform maintenance and repairs of electric gates should be set up. Meanwhile, with reference to "Code of Practice for Installation of Electrically Operated Sliding Gates, Sliding Glass Doors and Rolling Shutters" and "Safety Tips of Gates and Glass Doors Operation Work" published by the EMSD and the Occupational Safety and Health Council respectively, an owner of an electric gate shall ensure that the installation is regularly maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations to keep it in good working order. The spokesman stressed that the owner has the responsibility to ensure the safe installation and operation of the electric gate.

The spokesman also reminded operators to be vigilant in operating electric gates under a manual mode. They should pay attention to the moving range and speed of the gate, avoid the gate moving beyond the operating limit, and keep a safe distance from the device.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 0.00am today (August 17), a total of 1 875 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 are currently hospitalised for treatment, including 273 new patients. Among the patients staying in isolation facilities, 518 patients are in isolation wards, 141 patients are in second-tier isolation wards and 601 patients are in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, of which 214 in total are new patients. There are nine newly reported critical patients and nine newly reported serious patients. There are a total of 32 patients in critical condition and 33 are in serious condition, of which 10 critical patients are receiving intensive care. Moreover, there are 206 patients who have recovered, including 172 patients who have been discharged. In addition, four patients who passed away in public hospitals were reported.

In the fifth wave of the epidemic, there are 58 795 patients who have recovered so far, including 58 490 patients who have been discharged. And since early 2020, there are 71 175 patients who have recovered, including 70 870 patients who have been discharged.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public

and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

CHP investigates locally acquired SARS-CoV-2 virus cases with 2 167 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and 3 396 cases by RATs verified as well as 194 imported cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (August 17) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, August 17, the CHP was investigating 5 563 additional locally acquired cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, comprising 2 167 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (940 confirmed cases, 954 asymptomatic cases and 273 cases with pending status) and 3 396 cases that tested positive by rapid antigen tests (RATs) verified in the past 24 hours.

Separately, 194 additional imported cases were reported, including 173 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (25 confirmed cases, 116 asymptomatic cases and 32 cases with pending status) and 21 cases that tested positive by RATs.

Hong Kong has recorded a total of 850 525 and 583 312 cases that have tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations of the cases. Please refer to the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for more information.

As of yesterday (August 16), among the specimens received by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch for verification testing of local cases, about 7.7 per cent and 20.9 per cent of them (seven-day moving average) are related to the sub-lineages BA.2.12.1 and BA.4/BA.5 (including suspected cases) under the Omicron mutant strain respectively.

In addition, as of 0.00am, August 17, a total of 9 371 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 9 290 and 78 deaths reported from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively as well as three deaths reported from the Chinese University of Hong Kong Medical Centre. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 9 584 death cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Furthermore, among the earlier cases by nucleic acid tests reported, there were cases (including pending cases) changed to confirmed, asymptomatic or re-positive cases. As at yesterday, the total number of confirmed cases was 367 606, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 243 855, 31 and 236 693 respectively.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that as the local situation of COVID-19 infection is still severe, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with social distancing measures, avoid going out and refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings. This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

The spokesman reminded the public that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. People who have yet to receive vaccination, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, should get vaccinated as early as possible for self-protection and to reduce the risk of falling seriously ill and death should they get infected.

Temporary closure of FEHD's Airport Food Inspection Office

A spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (August 17) said that its Airport Food Inspection Office (AFIO) in Cathay Pacific Cargo Terminal, 3 Chun Wan Road, has been temporarily closed this late afternoon for thorough cleaning and disinfection because a staff member of the FEHD received a positive result when undergoing a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test. Services are expected to gradually resume later tonight after the completion of cleaning and disinfection work.

The staff member concerned is a health inspector of the FEHD and last performed duties on August 16. The staff member has been wearing masks and following relevant disease prevention measures at work.

The FEHD has arranged thorough cleaning and disinfection work at relevant places in accordance with the Centre for Health Protection's advice, and will arrange for the staff concerned to undergo COVID-19 testing. Importers seeking consignment clearances may proceed to the AFIOs located at South Office Block, Super Terminal 1, HACTL, and in Terminal 2, Asia Airfreight Terminal, Hong Kong International Airport.

The FEHD has been strictly implementing disease prevention measures during the epidemic. Staff members are reminded to pay attention to personal hygiene and to stay vigilant. They should seek medical advice immediately if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.