

Government responds to media reports on seasonal influenza vaccines

In response to media reports on the use of seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV), a spokesman for the Department of Health (DH) today (June 3) stressed that the Government has all along been committed in encouraging members of the public to receive SIV, and has made arrangement to facilitate members of the public (including school children) to receive SIV through various SIV programmes. Given the potential immunisation gap in children due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has expanded the eligibility of the SIV programmes, from young children and primary students to persons aged 12 to 18 since the 2022/23 SIV season, meaning that the vaccination programme has covered all children and adolescents aged below 18 years. Currently, over 1.86 million doses of SIV had been administered under various SIV programmes in the 2023/24 season, representing an increase of 20 per cent comparing with the same period last year, reaching a record high.

School Outreach Vaccination Services

To enhance the vaccination rate of schoolchildren and to assist in arranging outreach vaccination services by schools, the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) Programme was launched in 2018/19 and has been regularised since 2020/21. The Programme covers all the kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in the territory. The Government arranges for a Public-Private-Partnership Team or a Government Outreach Team to provide free SIV service for schoolchildren at participating schools. Schools not participating in the above free-of-charge programme can invite doctors providing outreach vaccination under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme from the list published on the Centre for Health Protection (CHP)'s website to arrange outreach SIV service at their campus under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed). For the current SIV season, around 350 secondary schools, around 630 primary schools and around 890 kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres have enrolled in the above two programmes, accounting for about 70, 95 and 80 per cent of the schools concerned across the territory respectively.

With the DH's publicity effort, the number of students receiving SIV in 2023/24 has significantly increased compared to last year. As at June 2, under the Government Vaccination Programme, about 538 200 doses of SIV have been administered for children aged between 6 months and below 18 years of age, reaching a record high and increased by about 36.9 per cent comparing to last year. The overall vaccine coverage rate has reached 52.9 per cent, which has marked an increase of 13.1 per cent for the same period last year (39.8 per cent).

Arrangement and limitation of live attenuated influenza vaccine (i.e. nasal vaccine) (LAIV)

According to recommendations of the Scientific Committee on Vaccine

Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the CHP of the DH, overseas research and clinical experience generally showed that both injectable inactivated influenza vaccines (IIV) and nasal LAIV are safe and both vaccines can offer comparable protection to the receivers. There is no scientific evidence supporting the priority use of nasal LAIV thus far. The DH has been conducting annual survey to gather feedback from enrolled doctors and schools in the school outreach programmes so as to make reference to the preference of participating schools (including receiving injectable IIV or nasal LAIV) when procuring vaccines.

According to the current arrangement under the SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) Programme, kindergarten and child care centres can choose to receive injectable IIV or nasal LAIV. Sufficient vaccines have been provided to those kindergartens and child care centres which chose nasal LAIV.

Also, kindergarten, child care centres, primary and secondary schools can discuss with outreach doctors on the provision of injectable IIV or nasal LAIV during the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed) activities. Parents can also arrange subsidised SIV at clinics of private doctors under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) for children and adolescents aged six months to less than 18 years. Private doctors enrolled in the VSS can also decide to use injectable IIV or nasal LAIV.

In fact, only about a quarter of the kindergartens and child care centres participated in the SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) Programme chose to use nasal LAIV. Based on past experience, the schools and healthcare providers participating in the outreach program will consider factors such as parental preference, side effects and contraindications of influenza vaccines when selecting the vaccines provided for outreach vaccination activities.

The spokesman reiterated that persons suitable for receiving IIV and LAIV vaccine are different. There are more restrictions for receiving nasal spray vaccines with more points to note, and the shelf-life is also shorter. Nasal LAIV are not applicable to persons who are pregnant, immunocompromised or with other contraindications, e.g. children 2 years through 4 years who have asthma or who have had a history of wheezing in the past 12 months; and concomitant aspirin or salicylate-containing therapy in children and adolescents.

The seasonal influenza vaccines for this season will be expired starting from July this year and the 2024/25 SIV programmes is expected to start in September. The DH will formulate the implementation details for the 2024/25 season, including the best mode of operation and types of vaccine to be provided, with reference to survey results against schools and doctors participating in the school outreach programmes of 2024, and latest recommendations and experience of SCVPD and health authorities of other areas.

Land and Development Advisory Committee holds meeting

At its meeting today (June 3), the Land and Development Advisory Committee was briefed by the Development Bureau (DEVB) on the Government's efforts to streamline development-related administrative processes, as well as the strategies and initiatives to promote the adoption of advanced construction technologies in the construction industry.

Members welcomed the Government's efforts in streamlining development-related administrative procedures. In particular, they highly appreciated the DEVB's initiative to promulgate a circular by the third quarter of 2024 to institutionalise the policy direction of adopting a facilitating and collaborative mindset in processing development-related applications. Guiding principles and good practices would also be provided to relevant bureaux and departments (B/Ds) for their reference in improving their practices. While noting that more measures would be required to cultivate a customer-oriented culture, Members considered that the new circular was a significant step forward to drive cultural change in approving B/Ds. They appreciated that the proposed circular had addressed common issues of concern faced by the industry, for instance, by requiring B/Ds to give specific reasons of rejection of proposals and suggest solutions to address B/D's requirements. Members suggested various means to ensure proper implementation of the circular, for instance, formulation of clear guidelines to frontline officers, ongoing evaluation and monitoring, effective communication with industry stakeholders and timely escalation to resolve problems, and sharing of successful experience. The Government would take into account Members' views and continue working with the industry and other relevant stakeholders to keep the administrative procedures under review and identify further rooms for improvement as necessary.

Members welcomed the Government's work to promote the adoption of advanced construction technologies, including Modular Integrated Construction (MiC), construction digitalisation such as adoption of Building Information Modelling (BIM) and enhancing applied research and development (R&D), in the construction industry. While sharing the vision of growing the MiC sector as an industry, Members acknowledged that the initiatives would assist in enhancing productivity and efficiency of the construction industry, as well as promoting the development of the supply chain of MiC modules by utilising Hong Kong's strengths in quality assurance, certification and marketing, as well as capitalising on cooperation with the Mainland, in particular in the Greater Bay Area. Members made various suggestions, including updating of standards and practices, enhancing collaboration with industry partners both in Hong Kong and outside Hong Kong, promoting wider adoption of MiC, establishing a Manufacturer Certification Scheme, increasing the cost-effectiveness of adopting MiC in individual projects, enhancing procurement approaches, strengthening R&D and other support for the construction industry, including sharing of successful experience and training. The

Government would take into account Members' views in promoting the use of advanced construction technologies.

Temporary closure of Police Museum

Due to facility damage caused by fallen trees today (June 3), the Police Museum at 27 Coombe Road, the Peak, Hong Kong will be temporarily closed from tomorrow for urgent repair works until further notice.

For enquiries, please call the museum at 2849 7019.

Launch of Hospitality Campaign (with video)

The Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung attended the launch of the Hospitality Campaign today (June 3) with representatives from the Education Bureau, the Home Affairs Department, the Information Services Department, the Radio Television Hong Kong as well as the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), the tourism and related sectors, the education sector and the districts, to jointly promote hospitality and reinforce Hong Kong's brand as the best tourism destination.

Mr Yeung said, "The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau had already started discussions and preparations to promote hospitality with relevant policy bureaux and departments as well as HKTB since early this year to encourage active involvement of all sectors in the community. With the Government's series of hospitality promotions, I hope that all sectors in the community can work together to display the spirit of hospitality and warmly receive visitors to Hong Kong with a view to strengthening Hong Kong's position as the best tourist destination."

He also expressed gratitude to the tourism and related sectors for their unfailing support in continuously improving service quality and launching various activities in conjunction with the Hospitality Campaign in order to create synergy and promote Hong Kong's reputation as a hospitable city.

To echo the Hospitality Campaign, the Education Bureau will provide schools with a series of learning and teaching resources and related information, and encourage schools to actively plan and promote activities related to the theme of courtesy, so as to further enable students to be

courteous with others. The Home Affairs Department will also assist in promoting messages on hospitality and fostering a friendly and courteous atmosphere in the community through organising community involvement activities in various districts.

HKTB will also launch its new promotion on hospitality on the theme of "Let's Go the Extra Mile", to encourage both frontline staff of the industries and members of public that everyone could demonstrate good hospitality by going a little step forward.

Officials of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government attending the launch today also included the Acting Secretary for Education, Mr Sze Chun-fai; the Commissioner for Tourism, Ms Vivian Sum; Director of Information Services, Mrs Apollonia Liu; Director of Broadcasting, Mr Eddie Cheung; and Deputy Director of Home Affairs, Ms Eureka Cheung.

Pest Control Steering Committee reviews progress of anti-mosquito and anti-rodent work implemented by departments (with photo)

The interdepartmental Pest Control Steering Committee (PCSC) held its 18th meeting today (June 3) to review the latest situation of mosquito infestation and the anti-mosquito work taken by departments. Furthermore, the PCSC also examined the work progress of departments under the Cross-sectoral Territory-wide Anti-rodent Action (the Action) and planned their anti-rodent work for the future.

Mosquito control

In view of a local Dengue Fever (DF) case recently, the representatives of the Department Health (DH) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) reported the follow-up work to the PCSC.

The Centre for Health Protection of the DH had immediately conducted epidemiological investigations and questionnaire surveys with neighbouring residents, as well as provided free DF antibody tests for people in the district with relevant symptoms. The FEHD had also immediately conducted mosquito infestation surveys and carried out additional targeted mosquito prevention and control work in areas within a 250-metre radius of the residence and workplace of the patient, as well as places he had visited during the incubation and infectious period. The FEHD also stepped up inspections and took enforcement actions where necessary. To date, no other

local infection cases have been found, and no DF virus has been detected in the collected mosquitoes.

Based on the latest surveillance data, the representative of DH reported that there has been an increase in DF cases in some places in Asia thus far, compared with the corresponding period of last year. The Americas (including Brazil, Argentina and Peru) have even recorded over 8 million cases, which is a record number, since the beginning of 2024.

After the World Health Organization's announcement in May 2023 that the COVID-19 epidemic situation no longer constitutes a "public health emergency of international concern", the inbound and outbound passenger traffic has become busy. Local mosquitoes may carry the virus and spread it to local residents as they bite imported DF patients, resulting in local infections and an increased risk of further local transmission. Furthermore, patients who have a second infection with a different type of DF virus are more likely to result in a serious complication, i.e. dengue hemorrhagic fever, which can lead to death. Therefore, members of the public should stay alert.

The representative of the FEHD reported to the PCSC the situation of mosquito infestation this year thus far. Similar to previous years, the Gravidtrap Indices started to rise since the rainy season commenced in April. As rainfall in April this year had more than doubled compared with the corresponding period last year, the FEHD immediately stepped up mosquito prevention and control work, including eliminating mosquito breeding places, applying larvicides, conducting fogging operations to eradicate adult mosquitoes, and placing mosquito trapping devices at suitable locations. The FEHD has also conducted on-site inspections with relevant departments, and provided them with professional advice and technical support.

The increasingly hot and rainy weather in Hong Kong in recent years has provided favourable conditions for mosquito breeding, while busier inbound and outbound passenger traffic may lead to an increasing risk of local transmission of DF. As such, the Under Secretary for Environment and Ecology, and the Chairperson of the PCSC, Miss Diane Wong, specifically reminded all departments not to let their guard down in the coming months, and that they should continually strengthen mosquito prevention and control work, such as conducting inspections of their venues and the surrounding environment, removing stagnant water, and adopting appropriate mosquito control devices, etc. All departments should also step up the All-out Anti-mosquito Operations to reduce the risk.

Rodent control

Under the Action, the FEHD will continue to implement a series of targeted rodent prevention and control measures, including continuing overnight anti-rodent operations and the application of new anti-rodent technologies and tools. The FEHD will also continue to conduct anti-rodent operations targeting 97 priority rodent black spots with a view to achieving the key performance indicator of reducing the number of black spots by 60 per cent by end 2024 as set out in the 2023 Policy Address. District

Environmental Hygiene Offices of the FEHD will also extend the scheme of allowing food premises to place large-sized refuse bins at rear lanes to more appropriate locations, and encourage relevant food premises to participate.

Furthermore, from this year, the FEHD has fully adopted thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence technology to conduct the Rodent Activity Survey (RAS) in each district for formulation of the Rodent Absence Rate. The FEHD will plan rodent prevention and control work, and deploy more effective anti-rodent actions in blackspots accordingly. Surveillance points with thermal imaging cameras installed cover various locations, including rear lanes, planter areas and other places where rodents may be present. In addition to adjusting the surveillance points based on investigation results, the FEHD is also co-ordinating with relevant departments to extend the RAS to venues managed by other departments (including the Housing Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department) next year to make the investigations more representative.

Representatives of relevant departments also reported their work taken under the Action. Apart from continuing to implement the Anti-rodent Action in Estates in the Hong Kong Housing Authority's public rental housing estates (PRHEs), the HD has reported the latest progress of rodent control in PRHEs, including strengthening daily cleaning and anti-rodent work, installing mobile surveillance systems in locations with serious rodent infestations to detect rodent activities, as well as adopting other new anti-rodent devices, etc. District Offices have incorporated anti-rodent services into the service contracts for providing cleaning services to the common areas of "three-nil" buildings on a need basis. The FEHD will continue to provide training and technical support on pest control to other departments responsible for managing public venues, aiming to strengthen their supervision of contracted service providers and enhance the level of pest control services.

All departments agreed to continue to strengthen rodent prevention and control measures in premises under their respective management, to strengthen internal monitoring and assessment of the outcome of rodent control work, and to actively encourage relevant sectors and stakeholders to co-operate with the Government's work, eliminating rodents' fundamental survival conditions of food, harbourage and passages from their respective areas. Furthermore, the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the FEHD are proactively following up on the second-stage amendment work of environmental hygiene-related legislation with a view to more effectively handle rodent infestation and other environmental hygiene issues.

The meeting was chaired by Miss Wong. Participants of the meeting came from three policy bureaux and 20 government departments and organisations.

