

CHP announces end of influenza season

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (July 25) announced the end of the influenza season which started in mid-January this year. Meanwhile, in view of the increasing local activity of COVID-19, the CHP reminded members of the public to continue to maintain personal, hand and environmental hygiene against respiratory tract infection including COVID-19, and stressed that vaccination can effectively prevent serious cases.

End of influenza season

Influenza activity in Hong Kong had continued to increase since entering the winter influenza season in mid-January 2024. It peaked around late April to late May and then dropped gradually. According to the latest surveillance data, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch was 5.16 per cent, and the admission rate with the principal diagnosis of influenza in public hospitals was 0.23 per 10 000 population in the week ending July 20. These data have returned below the baseline level (viz. 9.21 per cent for respiratory specimens testing positive and 0.25 per 10 000 population for admission rate) indicating the end of the influenza season.

In the past four weeks (June 23 to July 20), 42 outbreaks of influenza-like illnesses and 142 cases of severe influenza (including deaths) were reported, which were fewer than 66 outbreaks of influenza-like illnesses and 183 cases of severe influenza (including deaths) reported in the preceding four weeks (May 26 to June 22).

A spokesman for the CHP said, "The current influenza season lasted for 28 weeks, which is not common in Hong Kong. During the season, the predominating virus was influenza A(H3) initially, which later changed to A(H1) from April. Considering the local and overseas experience, the CHP believes that this prolonged influenza season can be attributable to a change of the circulating influenza virus strains."

Preparation for 2024/25 seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV)

The SIV programmes in the 2023/24 season reached a record high number of vaccinations. Over 1.87 million doses of vaccines were given under various programmes, representing an increase of around 20 per cent as compared with 2022/23.

The DH is actively preparing the SIV arrangement for 2024/25, which would commence later this year. Among other things, the DH strives to enhance the vaccination rate of school children through the following:

- The DH has met with the Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association, the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations, as well as relevant

medical associations respectively to listen to the views of different sectors on the arrangements of the school outreach programmes in the coming year;

- The DH has sent letters to all schools in Hong Kong through the Education Bureau inviting them to participate in the SIV school outreach vaccination programmes, and organised online briefing sessions introducing the arrangements;
- After considering views of different sectors and the feasibility, the choice of vaccine options will be more flexible under the 2024/25 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) Programme. Kindergarten and child care centres can choose to provide both injectable inactivated influenza vaccines and live attenuated influenza vaccines (i.e. nasal vaccines) (LAIV) at the same or different outreach activities. Moreover, the DH will closely monitor the response of schools (including kindergarten and child care centres, primary and secondary schools) applying for the outreach programmes and provide facilitation in a timely manner;
- Apart from the above-mentioned free-of-charge outreach programme, schools can also invite doctors providing outreach vaccinations under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme from the list published on the CHP's website to arrange outreach service for injectable inactivated influenza vaccines and/or nasal LAIV at their campus under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed).

The DH will announce more details of the vaccination programmes at the appropriate time.

COVID-19 situation

Meanwhile, the spokesman also reminded the public that the overall local activity of COVID-19 continues to increase. The CHP will continue to monitor the local COVID-19 situation through various surveillance indicators (including the positive detection rate of respiratory specimens, viral loads from sewage surveillance, numbers of severe and fatal cases, as well as schools/institutions outbreak reports etc). The CHP strongly urges members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, to receive vaccinations as early as possible for effective protection against COVID-19.

The spokesman appealed again to symptomatic individuals, even if the symptoms are mild, that they should wear surgical masks and seek medical attention promptly to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to high-risk persons. Personal, hand and environmental hygiene should also be maintained at all times.

For the latest information, please refer to the CHP's [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#), [influenza page](#), [COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website](#) and [Vaccination Schemes page](#).