

DH appeals for vaccination at appropriate times against respiratory tract infection

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 23) reminded that, local seasonal influenza and COVID-19 remain active while the influenza activity persists at a high level, it is believed that the current influenza season would continue for a period of time. The CHP appealed to members of the public to heighten their vigilance, and vaccination can effectively lower the risks of serious illness and death. Members of the public, especially high-risk groups, should receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) and COVID-19 vaccines in a timely manner.

The CHP has been closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation in Hong Kong. Surveillance data as at May 18 revealed that the local COVID-19 activity is comparable to the past few weeks, and KP.2 variants are detected among sewage surveillance and human infection cases. The sewage surveillance data as at May 14 revealed that JN.1 and its descendant lineages remained the most prevalent variant, comprising 98.8 per cent of all characterised specimens, and about 15 per cent belong to KP.2. According to information from the World Health Organization (WHO), KP.2 is one of the descendant lineages of JN.1 and is now assigned by the WHO as one of the variants being monitored. With regard to human infection cases, the test results for non-severe cases carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) of the CHP from May 8 to 21 revealed that JN.1 remained the most prevalent variant comprising 100 per cent of all characterised specimens, and about 6.7 per cent of all belongs to the newer descendant strain KP.2.

For seasonal influenza, as at the week ending May 18, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses received by the PHLSB and Hospital Authority was 12.85 per cent. The majority of positive detections were influenza A(H1) (around 91 per cent), showing a shift from influenza A(H3) which was the dominating virus during January to March this year. The influenza admission rate in public hospitals was 0.95 cases per 10 000 population. Both have remained at a high level.

A spokesman for the CHP said that vaccination is safe and effective for preventing seasonal influenza and COVID-19. The Government has long been committed to encouraging members of the public to receive SIV. Since the launch of the 2023/24 season SIV programmes from September last year, a total of over 1.86 million doses of SIV have been administered so far, representing an increase of 20 per cent compared with the same period of last season. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases under the CHP opined that SIV are effective against influenza A (including H1 and H3) and B. Members of the public who have not received SIV, in particular high risk groups such as young children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, should get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the CHP strongly appeals to high risk groups to receive a COVID-19 booster as soon as possible. Regardless of the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses received previously, they could receive a booster dose to be given at least six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later). The Government's free COVID-19 vaccination programme currently provides ample time slots to cater to scheduling requirements. High-risk groups should receive vaccination in a timely manner for enhanced personal protection. Since the rollout of the administration of XBB mRNA vaccines on December 14, as at May 22, about 178 000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered. Among them, about 139 000 doses were XBB mRNA vaccine.

Since the launch of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the Government has set up an online booking system which is available around the clock (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk). Members of the public may choose the desired vaccines and make a reservation via the system for COVID-19 vaccination at Private Clinic COVID-19 Vaccination Stations, Children Community Vaccination Centres, designated General Outpatient Clinics under the Hospital Authority, or designated Student Health Service Centres, Maternal and Child Health Centres and Elderly Health Centres under the DH. Elderly people living in the community aged 60 or above may seek assistance for making online bookings of COVID-19 vaccination at the Social Welfare Department 's District Elderly Community Centres and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (www.swd.gov.hk/en/pubsvc/elderly/cat_commsupp/elderly_centres/) or the Health Bureau's District Health Centres (DHCs) and DHC Expresses (www.dhc.gov.hk/en/index.html). Apart from providing COVID-19 vaccination services for members and non-members aged 65 or above, designated Elderly Health Centres (EHCs) (www.elderly.gov.hk/english/contactus/elderly_health_centres.html) of the DH will also provide assistance for elderly people in need to make online bookings for COVID-19 vaccines which are not provided at that EHC. Apart from making online bookings for COVID-19 vaccination, members of the public may also call the Private Clinic COVID-19 Vaccination Stations to enquire about relevant vaccination services. The full list of the stations can be accessed at www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/list_pcvs_covid_eng.pdf.

For the sake of convenience, COVID-19 vaccine can be co-administered with SIV. Details of receiving both COVID-19 vaccination and SIV are available online (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106096.html).

For the latest information, please visit the CHP's [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) and [influenza page](#). As for vaccination, the public may visit the [COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website](#) and [Vaccination Schemes page](#).