

DH urges people to get vaccinated as flu season approaches

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 2) said that the local seasonal influenza activity has continued to rise over the past week. As the weather gets colder, the seasonal influenza activity is expected to increase further and may exceed the threshold levels in the next one to two weeks, indicating that Hong Kong is about to enter the influenza season. To protect their health and that of their family members, all persons aged 6 months and above (except those with known contraindications) who have not yet received the seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) should act immediately. High-risk groups should also get vaccinated against COVID-19 concurrently to minimise the risk of serious complications and death after infection.

"The latest surveillance data (as of the week ending December 28, 2024) showed that the positive percentage of influenza detections among respiratory specimens in the past two weeks increased from 1.35 per cent to 3.5 per cent, while the admission rate of patients diagnosed with influenza in public hospitals increased from 0.08 to 0.23 cases per 10 000 population, representing a significant increase in both indicators," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Based on the statistical methodology recommended by the World Health Organization, the CHP sets threshold levels for the above two important influenza indicators to determine whether Hong Kong enters an influenza season. The threshold levels were 4.94 per cent and 0.27 cases per 10 000 population respectively. Both figures exceeding the threshold levels indicate that Hong Kong has entered the influenza season.

"Based on the latest surveillance data, past epidemiological analysis and other factors such as weather, the CHP anticipated that Hong Kong may enter the influenza season in the next one to two weeks. All sectors of the community should heighten their vigilance and step up personal protection measures. Influenza vaccination has been scientifically proven to be one of the most effective ways to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications, while significantly reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death from seasonal influenza. Therefore, members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, should receive SIV as soon as possible. Strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene should also be observed at all times. People with respiratory symptoms, even if mild, should wear surgical masks and seek medical advice promptly, and should not go to work or school to minimise the risk of disease transmission," the spokesperson said.

As there has been a significant increase in influenza activities in Europe, North America and some parts of Asia (including the Mainland, Japan and Korea), the CHP also reminds those who plan to travel during the Lunar New Year holidays to get vaccinated against influenza as early as possible,

pay attention to the influenza situation at their destinations and take appropriate personal protective measures before travelling.

"According to further analysis of the relationship between SIV and 31 cases of severe paediatric influenza-associated complications and deaths recorded during the influenza season from January to July in 2024, the CHP found that the rate of children aged between 6 months and 17 years, who had not received the SIV of that season and subsequently contracted influenza with severe complications or deaths, was about 3.2 times that of the vaccinated children. The protective effect is more pronounced in younger children; for example, in the 2- to 5-year-old age group, the relevant rate among unvaccinated children was about 6.4 times that of vaccinated children. Based on this, SIV is one of the most effective means to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications," the spokesperson said.

The Government has long been encouraging the public to receive vaccinations early, and providing free and subsidised SIV to eligible children, the elderly and other target groups through various Government vaccination programmes. The response has been encouraging. As of December 29, 2024, a total of about 1 806 000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccines have been administered under various SIV programmes, an increase of about 5.3 per cent over the same period in 2023. Among them, the number of schools participating in the SIV School Outreach Programme has significantly increased. So far, about 960 kindergartens and child care centres (91 per cent), 630 primary schools (96 per cent) and 470 secondary schools (94 per cent) have participated in SIV school outreach activities, which is higher than last year's rate (about 80 per cent for kindergartens and child care centres, 95 per cent for primary schools and 70 per cent for secondary schools participated last year). The increase in secondary schools is particularly obvious.

As of December 29, 2024, the SIV coverage rate for children aged 6 months to under 2 years was at a low level of about 16.9 per cent, which was slightly higher than that of the same period last year but still lower than that of other age groups of children. To enhance vaccination services for children aged 6 months to under 2 years and to boost the vaccination rate, the Government has opened the DH's Maternal & Child Health Centres (MCHCs) to all children aged 6 months to under 2 years to facilitate children's access to vaccinations as far as possible. Parents may book an appointment for their children to receive vaccinations at designated MCHCs via the [online booking system](#).

In addition, as patients contracting both influenza and COVID-19 are more likely to develop serious complications and die, the CHP strongly urges those who have not received the initial dose of COVID-19 vaccine, especially young children over 6 months and elderly people, to receive an initial dose as soon as possible. Those high-risk groups should, in a timely manner, receive an additional booster dose six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later), regardless of the number of doses received previously. All eligible persons can make appointments through the Government's [online booking platform](#) to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

The CHP will continue to closely monitor the situation of seasonal influenza both locally and overseas. For the latest information, members of the public can visit the CHP's [seasonal influenza](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) webpages. Details of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme can also be found on the CHP's [thematic website](#).