

DH urges people to get vaccinated as soon as possible to cope with influenza season

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 20) said that the latest surveillance data showed an increase in activities of seasonal influenza and COVID-19 recently. Anticipating both seasonal influenza and COVID-19 will become more active as the weather gets colder, the CHP urges all persons aged 6 months or above (except those with known contraindications) to protect their health and that of their family members by receiving seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) as soon as possible. Furthermore, individuals in high-risk groups are encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19 concurrently to minimise the risk of serious complications and death after infection.

"The CHP has been closely monitoring local activity of respiratory pathogens in the community. Latest surveillance data on the percentage of seasonal influenza viruses detected among respiratory specimens, the influenza-associated admission rate in public hospitals, and the number of influenza-like illnesses among sentinel general out-patient clinics and private medical practitioner clinics show an increase in seasonal influenza activity from the low level over the past four weeks," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"Regarding COVID-19, the most predominant circulating strains in Hong Kong are JN.1 and its descendant lineages. While the overall activity level of COVID-19 has decreased since late July this year to a low level, there has been an increase from the low level recently," he added.

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. For schoolchildren, vaccination can reduce the chance of school absenteeism due to illness, which is beneficial to their health and learning.

"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 positive. As of December 15, a total of about 1 745 000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccines have been administered under the various SIV programmes, an increase of about 5 per cent over the same period last year, with particularly strong increases of 17 per cent and 27 per cent in the number of doses received by persons aged between 50 and 64 and those aged between 12 and 18 respectively," the spokesman said.

The spokesman attributed the increase in the number of doses received by schoolchildren to the SIV School Outreach Programme. To boost the SIV coverage rate among schoolchildren, special arrangements have been made under the Outreach Programme this year:

- To offer a more flexible choice of vaccine options for kindergartens and child care centres, they 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 vaccination activities.
- As a pilot scheme, LAIV is also provided to selected primary and secondary schools that indicated their preference for LAIV earlier this year.

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 completed or are arranging 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. Some schools have not yet arranged outreach SIV activities, and the CHP has already appealed to the parents of these schools to arrange vaccination for their children.

"As of December 15, the SIV coverage rate for children aged 6 months to under 2 years was 16.4 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. This year, service provider locations have also been optimised, with the DH's Maternal & Child Health Centres (MCHCs) open to all children aged 6 months to under 2 years, with a view to facilitating children's access to vaccinations as far as possible. Parents are advised to arrange SIV for their children as early as possible to protect the health of their children. They may book an appointment for their children to receive vaccinations at designated MCHCs via the online booking system (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk/forms/sivfhs/index.jsp)," he said.

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 from Children Community Vaccination Centre, Private Clinic COVID-19 Community Vaccination Stations (PCVs), designated general outpatient clinics under the Hospital Authority, or designated Student Health Service Centres, MCHCs and Elderly Health Centres of the DH.

The CHP will continue to closely monitor the situation of seasonal influenza and COVID-19 both locally and overseas. For more information on influenza and COVID-19, 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 [website](#).