

## DH urges public to receive vaccination as Hong Kong enters influenza season

The Controller of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui, today (January 9) announced that the latest surveillance data revealed that Hong Kong has entered the influenza season. As the weather gets colder, the seasonal influenza activity is expected to increase further in the coming weeks while the activity of other respiratory infectious diseases may also increase. All sectors of the community should heighten their vigilance and enhance personal protection measures against influenza, including receiving a vaccination to protect their health and that of their family members.

"According to the latest surveillance data as at January 4, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses is 5.69 per cent. The influenza admission rate in public hospitals is 0.36 cases per 10 000 population. Both indicators have exceeded the threshold of 4.94 per cent and 0.27 cases per 10 000 population respectively, indicating that Hong Kong has entered the influenza season. The majority of positive detections were influenza A (H1), accounting for around 90 per cent," Dr Tsui said.

Separately, the number of reported influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks started to increase after the Christmas and New Year holidays at the end of December last year, with a total of seven institutional/school outbreaks in the week ending January 4, affecting a total of 45 persons. Compared with two to four cases per week in December last year, the increase in cases was more than 50 per cent. As Hong Kong enters the influenza season, the number of ILI outbreaks is expected to continue to increase and there may be relatively more outbreaks in schools. To reduce the transmission of influenza in schools, the CHP has issued letters to schools reminding them to take additional measures. The CHP will also issue letters to doctors, hospitals, and institutions to appeal for heightened vigilance and appropriate measures to join hands to combat influenza.

"Based on previous surveillance data, virus activity will continue to increase for a period of time after the start of the influenza season before peaking. Members of the public who have not yet received seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV), particularly the elderly and children who have higher risk to get infected with influenza and other complications, should receive SIV immediately to lower the risk of serious complications and death," he said.

The Government has long been encouraging the public to receive SIV early, and has been providing free and subsidised SIV to eligible persons through various government vaccination programmes. As of January 5, a total of about 1 832 000 doses of vaccines have been administered under the various vaccination programmes, an increase of about 5.4 per cent over the same period last year. Among them, the number of schools participating in the SIV School Outreach Programme has also increased significantly compared with last

year, particularly the number of secondary schools. However, 168 [schools](#) still refused to arrange SIV outreach activities for students. Another 13 [schools](#) which have agreed to arrange SIV outreach activities have not yet provided a confirmed date for vaccinations. The CHP has listed these schools on its website.

Dr Tsui appealed to the parents of these schools to bring their children to receive SIV as soon as possible, as research studies have shown that influenza vaccination among children can reduce serious complications and lower school absenteeism. He strongly urges schools that have not yet set a date for vaccination to arrange vaccination activities as soon as possible in the next two weeks to protect the health of schoolchildren and minimise absenteeism due to influenza which can affect their learning.

Furthermore, the SIV coverage rate for children aged 6 months to under 2 years remained relatively low at about 17.4 per cent as of January 5. Although slightly higher than that of the same period last year, it is still lower than that of other age groups of children. To enhance relevant vaccination services and boost the vaccination rate, the Government has opened the DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) to all children aged 6 months to under 2 years. Parents may book an appointment for their children to receive vaccinations at designated MCHCs via the [online booking system](#).

Dr Tsui reminded high-risk persons to wear a surgical mask when visiting public places, and the public should also consider wearing a surgical mask when taking public transportation or staying at crowded places. People with respiratory symptoms, even if mild, should wear surgical masks and seek medical advice promptly, and should consider whether to go to work or school. For the latest information, members of the public can visit the CHP's [seasonal influenza](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) webpages.