

DH's response to media enquiries

â€œIn response to media enquiries on a death case not fulfilling the reporting criteria of Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFIs), a spokesperson for the Department of Health (DH) responded today (March 31) as follows:

The Department of Health (DH) has been closely monitoring possible adverse events following COVID-19 immunization. Based on the guidelines of the World Health Organization, the DH enhanced the existing surveillance system and carried out active surveillance. Under the surveillance system, the DH monitors AEFIs and encourages and receives from healthcare providers and pharmaceutical industry AEFI reports of COVID-19 immunization. The DH also partners with the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to conduct an active surveillance programme for Adverse Events of Special Interest under the COVID-19 Vaccines Adverse Events Response and Evaluation Programme (CARE Programme).

The DH reiterated that according to reporting criteria of AEFIs endorsed by the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation, when there are obvious medical causes (including clinical diagnosis and pathological evidence) for certain clinical events including death cases, the healthcare professionals may consider the event not fulfilling the reporting criteria of AEFIs. On the other hand, under the CARE Programme, the DH and the Hospital Authority have set up mechanism to refer death cases not fulfilling reporting criteria of AEFIs to HKU for surveillance and analysis. The HKU would provide regular reports to the Expert Committee; if unusual pattern is detected, the DH will be notified and the information will be referred to the Expert Committee for assessment as soon as possible.

Apart from handling cases referred by the Hospital Authority, the DH's public mortuaries had dealt with three Coroner's Court cases with a history of COVID-19 vaccination, including an 80-year-old woman who passed away at home. Based on a preliminary autopsy conducted by the DH's forensic pathologist, the finding was ruptured myocardial infarction and the professional judgement was that there was no direct causal relationship between her death and vaccination, thus not fulfilling the reporting criteria of AEFIs. The two other deceased, i.e. a 58-year-old man and a 30-year-old woman, passed away due to drowning and fall from height respectively, which had no direct causal relationship between their death and vaccinations, hence also not fulfilling the reporting criteria of AEFIs as well. The three cases will be passed to HKU's CARE Programme for analysis.

The spokesperson for the DH emphasised that the DH has all along been acting based on professionalism and scientific evidences to determine whether an event fulfills the reporting criteria of AEFIs.