

EDB announces implementation of "vaccine bubble" in schools

The Education Bureau (EDB) issued a letter to all schools in Hong Kong today (January 20) to inform them of the details of the arrangement of the implementation of "vaccine bubble" covering schools from February 24.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "Starting from February 24, except for those exempted (e.g. those who are unfit for vaccination due to health reasons), all teaching and non-teaching staff, persons providing on-campus services and visitors of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools (including special schools and their boarding sections, and schools offering non-local curriculum), and private schools offering non-formal curriculum (commonly known as 'tutorial schools'), will be required to present vaccination records of at least the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine prior to their entry into school premises.

"In addition, teachers and school staff directly employed by schools who have received only one dose of COVID-19 vaccine should receive the second dose of vaccination during the period within eight weeks after February 24, that is, have received the second dose before April 21."

For those exempted personnel who have not had vaccination, they are still required to conduct COVID-19 tests once every three days. The specimens must be obtained from combined nasal and throat swabs, and not collected through self-testing kits.

Although the "vaccine bubble" arrangement does not apply to students, the EDB urges students in the relevant age groups to get vaccinated as soon as possible to better protect themselves and others, and to have more opportunities to participate in learning and extra-curricular activities.

Schools should clearly record and keep a register of related vaccination records properly and the records of the negative test results of the school staff and other persons concerned.

The spokesman said that schools should inform all related stakeholders (including all school staff, school bus operators, tuck shop operators, parents, nannies and volunteers) of the related details before the implementation of the "vaccine bubble" arrangement, and strongly urge unvaccinated staff to receive vaccination as soon as possible.

He stressed that starting from February 24, under no circumstances should any unvaccinated staff (apart from those exempted) employed by the schools be allowed to perform teaching or other duties online or off-campus during the periods when face-to-face classes are not suspended. The school management has the responsibility to take action in respect of staff disciplinary matters in accordance with the provisions of the Employment Ordinance and the Codes of Aid.

The spokesman added that the Government is introducing enhancements to the "LeaveHomeSafe" and the QR Code Verification Scanner applications to facilitate premises to ascertain the vaccination status of visitors. Schools should

promptly set up QR codes for "LeaveHomeSafe"

(www.leavehomesafe.gov.hk/en/registration) to facilitate all teaching and non-teaching staff, persons providing on-campus services and all other visitors (apart from those exempted) to use the mobile application each time they enter school premises by February 24 and thereafter. Students entering school premises can be exempted.

The spokesman reiterated that vaccination is a crucial part of the local anti-epidemic strategy, and urged all school staff and visitors to get vaccinated as soon as possible to construct a more effective protective barrier for both schools and the community.

The school letter has been uploaded onto the EDB website

(www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/diseases-prevention/edb_20220120_eng_a.pdf).