

# End of winter influenza season 2019

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (April 10) announced the end of the winter influenza season. Members of the public are, however, advised to continue to maintain personal, hand and environmental hygiene against respiratory diseases.

"Hong Kong entered the winter influenza season in early January this year. The influenza activity peaked around mid to late January and started to decrease continuously and returned to the baseline level in early April. This season lasted for about 14 weeks from the week of December 30, 2018, to the week ending April 6.

"The predominating virus of this influenza season has been influenza A(H1). Epidemiological experience shows that children are relatively more affected in seasons with a predominance of influenza A(H1) and this was reflected by the large number of outbreaks of influenza-like illness (ILI) in kindergartens/child care centres this season and the high influenza-associated hospitalisation rate among children aged below six this season," a spokesman for the CHP said.

According to the latest surveillance data, the percentage of respiratory specimens that tested positive for seasonal influenza viruses received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch peaked at 30.10 per cent in the week ending January 19 and declined to 6.32 per cent in the week ending April 6.

Meanwhile, the number of institutional ILI outbreaks dropped from 209 cases (affecting 1 575 persons) in the week ending January 19 to 12 cases (69 persons) in the week ending April 6. As of yesterday (April 9) nine ILI outbreaks had been recorded this week affecting 34 persons.

The weekly average rate of the ILI syndrome group in the accident and emergency departments decreased from the peak of 254 cases per 1 000 coded cases in the week ending January 19 to 188.2 in that ending April 6. In the same period, the overall admission rate in public hospitals with a principal diagnosis of influenza also decreased from the peak of 1.59 per 10 000 population to 0.22.

For adults, 601 cases of influenza-associated admission to the Intensive Care Unit or death (356 deaths) were recorded this influenza season (from the week of December 30, 2018, to the week ending April 6). As for children (aged under 18), 24 severe cases (one death) were reported in the same period. About 73 per cent had not received seasonal influenza vaccination for the current season.

As of April 7, about 487 000 and 580 000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccine (SIV) had been administered via the Government Vaccination Programme of free vaccinations and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) of subsidised

vaccinations (including Enhanced VSS Outreach Vaccination) respectively, increasing by 2.2 per cent and 73.3 per cent from the same period last season. Including the 121 000 doses administered through the School Outreach Vaccination Pilot Programme, the total number of doses administered via various vaccination programmes was about 1 188 000, representing a 46.5 per cent increase from the same period in the 2017/18 year.

"Although the winter influenza season has ended, members of the public aged six months or above who have not yet received any SIV in the 2018/19 season can still receive it for personal protection against seasonal influenza. However, persons who have already completed seasonal influenza vaccination in the 2018/19 season are not recommended to receive any further dose of SIV within the same season.

"Meanwhile, the public should continue to adopt strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene practices against respiratory illnesses and other infectious diseases," the spokesman added.

The public may visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and weekly [Flu Express](#) for more information.