

Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation assesses serious adverse events relating to COVID-19 vaccination

The Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation (Expert Committee) convened a meeting today (March 15) to assess serious adverse events relating to COVID-19 vaccination including five death cases and one case in critical condition. The Expert Committee preliminarily considered that the events and the vaccination did not have direct causal association. However, full autopsy reports would be required for death cases before the Expert Committee concludes the causality assessment.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Adverse Events Following Immunisation refers to any untoward medical occurrence which follows immunisation and which does not necessarily have a causal relationship with the usage of the vaccine. Under the established mechanism, upon receipt of reports from the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health (DH) will immediately contact the HA for further information and refer the cases to the Expert Committee for deliberation. The Expert Committee would review the case with all available information, including the medical conditions and history of the patient as well as relevant clinical data, available information related to the vaccine and preliminary autopsy findings (if applicable), and conduct causality assessment based on the algorithm of the WHO.

For the five death cases, the first case, which was announced on March 8, involved a 71-year-old man who received treatment in the United Christian Hospital, who passed away on March 8. Based on the preliminary autopsy findings of serious coronary heart disease, which led to pulmonary oedema and death, the Expert Committee considered that the deceased's outcome was not directly associated with COVID-19 vaccination.

The second case, which was announced on March 11, involved a 70-year-old woman who had history of hypertension and osteoarthritis of knee. She received treatment in the Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH) and passed away on March 11. Based on the preliminary autopsy findings of serious coronary heart disease, which led to myocardial infarction, pulmonary oedema and death, the Expert Committee considered that the deceased's outcome was not directly associated with COVID-19 vaccination.

The third case, which was announced on March 7 involved an 80-year-old man who received treatment in the Caritas Medical Centre and subsequently transferred to the Princess Margaret Hospital. He passed away on March 13 due

to ischaemic bowel disease. The Expert Committee noted the case and will conduct the causality assessment when the autopsy report is available.

The fourth case, which was announced on March 11, was about a 67-year-old man who had history of diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia. He received treatment in KWH and passed away on March 13. Based on the preliminary autopsy findings of serious cardiovascular diseases, which might lead to heart failure, arrhythmia and death, the Expert Committee considered that the deceased's outcome was not directly associated with COVID-19 vaccination.

The fifth case, which was announced on March 13, was about a 63-year-old man who was treated in the North District Hospital and passed away on March 14. The Expert Committee noted the case and will conclude the causality assessment when the autopsy report is available.

The Expert Committee also discussed a case in critical condition announced on March 9, involved a 51-year-old man who has history of diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia. He experienced shortness of breath since March 6 with cough and sputum. He was admitted to the intensive care unit of Queen Elizabeth Hospital on March 8 for treatment. The provisional diagnosis was acute myocardial infarction. Based on the patient's medical history, the Expert Committee preliminary considered that the patient's outcome was not directly associated with COVID-19 vaccination.

According to the information of the HA, in 2020, the provisional number of hospital admission due to myocardial infarction was about 7 300 cases. According to the mortality rates in Hong Kong, there were on average 16.7 persons passed away every day due to ischemic heart diseases and other heart diseases in 2019.

As a whole population, people with acute medical conditions with various severity are admitted to the hospitals every day. The Expert Committee had reviewed the number of death cases reported after the commencement of the vaccination programme and the death rates of the similar group in the same period of previous year, and no unusual pattern has been identified so far. Moreover, the existing available information of the reported cases also does not show any causal relationship with the vaccines. The Expert Committee will continue to closely monitor the situation and collect more data for further assessment.

The Expert Committee has also discussed in today's meeting on the existing risk communication plan upon receipt of notification of clinical events, and agreed on the continual release and update of the figures collected through the designated website regularly. For serious adverse event involving death case, it will be announced via press release as soon as possible.