

Free influenza vaccination to start on October 22

With the launch of the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP) 2020/21 this Thursday (October 22), the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (October 18) said that a steady supply of seasonal influenza vaccines will be ensured under the programme and appealed to eligible persons to receive free seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) in the public health system to better protect themselves in the coming winter influenza season.

Meanwhile, under the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge), the Government will arrange a Public-Private-Partnership Team or a Government Outreach Team to provide free vaccination for schoolchildren in participating schools. At present, around 450 primary schools and 760 kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres are participating in the programme. The outreach service for primary schools will also start on October 22 while the service for kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres has already started on October 8.

The DH has procured a total of 878 000 doses of inactivated influenza vaccine for the 2020/21 vaccination programmes, including 628 000 doses for the GVP and 250 000 doses for "Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge – Primary School)", to provide free vaccination to the eligible high-risk groups in phases.

The DH noted that there is a tight supply of influenza vaccines around the world. While vaccine suppliers have undertaken to ensure a steady supply for the Government, the DH will closely monitor the vaccination statistics and stocks of vaccines to assess the situation and maintain close liaison with vaccine suppliers.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. Given that influenza vaccines are safe and effective, all persons aged 6 months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive SIV for personal protection.

"Based on past epidemiological patterns, the winter influenza season usually starts in January. However, the exact time of arrival cannot be predicted. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public are advised to receive SIV timely for protection against seasonal influenza."

Apart from vaccination, effective ways to prevent infection from seasonal influenza include maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene, in particular the proper use of surgical masks, performing hand hygiene at all times, maintaining a balanced diet, regular exercise, not

smoking and avoiding alcohol consumption (www.chp.gov.hk/en/resources/464/29.html).

The GVP will in phases provide vaccination to Hong Kong residents in the following eligible groups through designated public clinics (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/202021_gvp_provisional_table_eng.pdf):

- Pregnant women who are Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients or Certificate for Waiver of Medical Charges (Certificate) holders can get vaccination in Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) of the DH or Antenatal Clinics of the Hospital Authority (HA);
- Children aged 6 months to under 12 years receiving CSSA or holding the Certificate can receive vaccination in MCHCs (6 months to under 6 years) and Student Health Service Centres of the DH (6 to under 12 years). Those seeking telephone booking for eligible primary school children may call the Student Health Service's telephone line (2856 9133);
- Elderly persons aged 65 or above attending public clinics, persons who are CSSA recipients or Certificate holders aged 50 to under 65 and those aged below 50 with chronic medical problems, eligible in-patients (including paediatric patients) of the HA and eligible paediatric out-patients, and eligible persons with intellectual disabilities and community-living persons receiving Disability Allowance can receive vaccination during their follow-up or stay in public clinics/hospitals;
- Residents of homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as residential child care centres, public/institutional healthcare workers, poultry workers and pig farmers can also get vaccination through arrangements by their residential care homes or work units; and
- Persons who are recipients of the standard rate of "100% disabled" or "requiring constant attendance" under the CSSA Scheme.

Further to the above, community-living elderly persons aged 65 or above can get vaccination in General Out-patient Clinics of the HA and designated Elderly Health Centres of the DH starting from November 2.

Meanwhile, free/subsidised pneumococcal vaccination (PV) for eligible persons will continue to be provided under the GVP and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) to prevent pneumococcal infections. Those aged 65 or above who do not have high-risk conditions will be eligible for one dose of 23-valent polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccination (23vPPV). Elderly persons with high-risk conditions who have not received PV before will be eligible for one dose of 13-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and one dose of 23vPPV one year later. The subsidy under the VSS will be \$300 per dose of 23vPPV and \$760 per dose of PCV13.

The public, especially eligible groups, may call the CHP's telephone line (2125 2125) for enquiries during office hours or visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#) for more information.