

Government allocates seasonal influenza vaccines to facilitate vaccination for high risk groups

In view of the keen demand for seasonal influenza vaccines (SIV) by members of the public recently and the tight supply of SIV around the world, the Government announced today (October 22) the latest arrangement to increase the overall supply of SIV and allocation arrangement of SIV, with a view to encouraging eligible high-risk persons to receive SIV as soon as practicable to prevent seasonal influenza.

A spokesperson for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Priority will be given to meet the demand for SIV from high-risk groups such that they are able to receive SIV as soon as possible through various Government vaccination programmes. In addition to the 878 000 doses of inactivated influenza vaccine earlier procured for eligible high-risk groups to receive SIV free-of-charge under the Government Vaccination Programme and 2020/21 SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) in primary schools, we will procure additional SIV, as well as provide an additional 100 000 doses of SIV in phases to Public-Private-Partnership Team which provides vaccination for schoolchildren and doctors enrolled in the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS), which require the SIV. This facilitates high risk groups to receive vaccination early and helps relieve the tight supply in the private healthcare sectors.

The 100 000 doses of additional SIV to be provided from the Government to private healthcare sector include quadrivalent inactivated influenza vaccine and live attenuated influenza vaccine. The priority groups for allocation (not in specific orders) and relevant conditions are listed below:

1. Doctors who have enrolled in the 2020/21 SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) and are not able to procure sufficient vaccines for students;
2. Doctors who have enrolled in the VSS, with priority given to those who have yet to be able to procure any quadrivalent influenza vaccines in the 2020/21 season; and
3. Non-governmental organisations/private doctors/clinics enrolled in the VSS coordinated by the Home Affairs Department.

Private doctors receiving SIV under the allocation arrangement must undertake not to charge extra fees when providing vaccinations to eligible persons. Moreover, private doctors or clinics with allocated SIV must sign undertakings and submit documentations to prove that the SIV allocated had been utilised according to relevant conditions. The subsidy for provision of vaccination services under the current allocation exercise is \$100 per dose, which is the same as the subsidy per dose under other Government vaccination

programmes.

The Department of Health (DH) will in due course contact the doctors who have enrolled in the 2020/21 SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) and the VSS to explain the details of the arrangement and arrange allocation exercise. The Home Affairs Department will also separately announce relevant details later. The number of SIV to be received by the priority groups mentioned above will depend on the demand and supply. The allocation exercise is expected to be completed within December 2020. Unallocated SIV will be used in other Government vaccination programmes.

The eligible high-risk groups under the VSS are Hong Kong residents aged 50 years or above, children aged 6 months to under 12 years (or primary school students), pregnant women, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons receiving Disability Allowance and persons who are recipients of the standard rate of "100% disabled" or "requiring constant attendance" under Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme. The public in particular persons of eligible groups may call the Centre for Health Protection's telephone number (2125 2125) during office hours or visit the [Vaccination Schemes page](#) for more details.

Separately, DH has been closely in touch with the vaccine suppliers and noted that a new batch of influenza vaccines of around 85 000 doses would arrive in Hong Kong in mid to late November 2020 for supply to local private healthcare sector.

The spokesperson appealed to eligible persons to receive free SIV in the public health system as far as possible. Doctors who have enrolled in the 2020/21 SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) and VSS should reserve procured SIV for eligible high-risk persons as far as possible.

Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. Given that influenza vaccines are safe and effective, all persons aged six 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.

In addition, according to media reports, Korea had recently reported death cases after receiving SIV, and it was reported that the vaccination programme in Korea had adopted vaccines produced by Korean suppliers. There is no SIV produced by Korean suppliers among the SIV registered in Hong Kong but DH will continue to closely monitor the situation.

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).