

Government announces latest development of COVID-19 vaccine procurement

The Government announced on December 11 the latest development of COVID-19 vaccine procurement.

The Government has been adopting a "two-pronged" strategy to procure vaccines for protecting members of the public against COVID-19, including joining the COVAX Facility led by the World Health Organization and directly making advance purchases of vaccines from individual vaccine developers. For advance purchase agreements, the Government's goal is to procure at least two candidate vaccines from different vaccine developers and different vaccine technology platforms, and to procure sufficient doses to serve at least two times the Hong Kong population.

The Government has reached a preliminary agreement with Sinovac Biotech (Hong Kong) Limited to provide 7.5 million doses of vaccine to Hong Kong. This vaccine is developed from the inactivated virus technology platform. The first batch of one million vaccine doses is expected to be delivered to Hong Kong in January 2021 the earliest. After the vaccine obtains approval from the Government, arrangement will be made for the public to receive vaccination as soon as possible.

The Government has also reached an agreement with Fosun Pharma to procure a maximum of 7.5 million doses of the vaccine developed by Fosun Pharma in collaboration with the German drug manufacturer BioNTech (Pfizer is the collaboration partner of BioNTech in regions outside of Greater China). This vaccine is developed from the mRNA technology platform. The first batch of one million doses is expected to be delivered in the first quarter of 2021 the earliest.

For the two aforementioned vaccines, individuals are required to receive two doses. The amount of doses procured is sufficient to cover the entire Hong Kong population.

Moreover, the Government will soon enter into an agreement with AstraZeneca to procure 7.5 million doses of the vaccine it developed in collaboration with the University of Oxford. This vaccine is developed from the non-replicating viral vector technology platform. According to information available, supply of the vaccine will be slightly later and the doses are expected to start arriving in Hong Kong by batches by the end of the second quarter of 2021 the earliest.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The global competition for vaccines is very vigorous, and it is expected that supply in the initial stage will be relatively tight. We will continue to negotiate procurement arrangements with other vaccine developers and strive to provide sufficient

supplies of vaccines for the Hong Kong population as early as possible. At the same time, to expedite the registration procedures of vaccines in Hong Kong to allow the early use of the vaccines, we have commenced working on an emergency legislation to enable the emergency use of vaccines proven to be safe and effective in Hong Kong."

As regards the arrangements for vaccination, the Government's goal is to provide vaccines for the majority of the Hong Kong population within 2021 through vaccination programmes led by the Government. Members of the public can receive the vaccines on a voluntary basis free of charge. We will make reference to the views of the relevant Scientific Committees and the expert advisory group and arrange for priority groups to receive vaccination first, including groups which have higher risks of coming into contact with the COVID-19 virus (e.g. healthcare workers), groups which have greater mortality rates after contracting the disease (e.g. the elderly, chronic patients), and/or groups which may easily transmit the virus to the vulnerable or weak if infected (e.g. staff of residential care homes). As the vaccines will arrive Hong Kong in batches, the Government will arrange for members of the public to receive vaccination as early as possible based on priority and the characteristics of the vaccines. The Government will announce the details of the vaccination programme in due course.