

Government launches new round of outreach vaccination service's special programme for residential care homes

In view of the recent volatile COVID-19 epidemic situation, as well as the impending winter surge of influenza, the Government launched a new round of outreach vaccination service special programme for residential care homes (RCHs) today (November 25) to strengthen the targeted protection for RCHs for the elderly and persons with disabilities. The special programme commenced today and will last for four weeks. Medical teams will be arranged to visit RCHs at least once a week to provide the outreach vaccination service, with a view to administering vaccines to every resident who is due to get vaccinated as soon as possible, in particular the fourth dose as a booster dose. The seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) will also be provided to residents at the same time to attain dual protection.

The previous round of the special programme was conducted from the end of July to the end of September. Medical teams had conducted over 4 300 visits to RCHs altogether and administered more than 34 000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to residents. The first, second and third dose vaccination rates at RCHs have increased significantly from the original 93 per cent/87 per cent/40 per cent to 95 per cent/93 per cent/78 per cent, building an effective protection barrier for RCHs.

The number of confirmed cases among RCH residents and staff members as well as that of hospitalisation cases of infected elderly have been rising recently. For the past week (November 18 to 24) in particular, the number of RCHs which have reported cases within seven days has surged by more than 20 per cent compared to that of the previous week. The proportion of infected elderly RCH residents among hospitalisation cases has also grown by nearly 10 per cent compared with that of the previous week, whereas the fourth dose vaccination rate of RCH residents at present is only around 11 per cent. In this connection, there is a need to further strengthen the targeted protection for RCHs for the elderly and persons with disabilities. According to experts' recommendation, adult residents who have not been infected with COVID-19 and had received the third dose should receive the fourth dose at least 90 days after receiving the third dose. As such, the Government launched a new round of the outreach vaccination service special programme, with a view to expediting the increase in COVID-19 vaccination rates of RCH residents, especially that of the fourth dose, so as to reinforce the protection barrier for RCHs. Under the special programme, the Government will provide a special allowance for the visiting registered medical practitioners or outreach medical teams to cover the additional manpower and transportation costs involved.

At the same time, according to the consensus reached by the Scientific Committees under the Centre for Health Protection in August this year, COVID-19 vaccines can be administered at the same time as other vaccines,

including SIV. Medical teams providing outreach vaccination service will also administer SIV to the residents and staff members in need when they visit RCHs. As the winter influenza season is approaching and the local seasonal influenza activity has remained at a low level since February 2020, the overall immunity of Hong Kong citizens (including that of RCH residents and staff members) against influenza is relatively low at present. The Government strongly urges them to complete the recommended dosage of COVID-19 vaccines and the latest SIV as early as possible, so that they can secure better protection in the event of co-infection with COVID-19 and influenza.

A Government spokesman said, "Receiving COVID-19 vaccination is safe and highly effective in lowering the risks of severe cases and deaths for RCH residents in case of infection. Currently, although the proportion of infected RCH residents among all hospitalisation cases is on the rise, it remains at a relatively low level. This indicates that our various anti-epidemic measures being implemented in RCHs, including driving up the vaccination rates at RCHs at full speed, can effectively protect the residents. Nevertheless, we cannot let our guard down especially in light of the recent worsening epidemic situation and the continuous rise in the number of confirmed cases. The Government calls on all sectors to stay alert as well as the RCH sector and medical teams to keep reinforcing their collaboration to further increase the COVID-19 vaccination rate of residents in order to prevent any outbreak in RCHs."