

Government responds to use of COVID-19 vaccines

Regarding a media report which claimed that Hong Kong will throw away millions of COVID-19 vaccine doses due to low vaccination rate, a Government spokesman responded today (May 25) as follows:

So far, the Government has procured and authorised a total of 15 million doses of the Sinovac and Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccines (Note 1) for emergency use. The procured quantity is sufficient for vaccination by the entire population of Hong Kong.

As at May 24, over 2.17 million doses of vaccines had been administered to members of the public (940 000 doses of the Sinovac vaccine and 1.23 million doses of the Comirnaty vaccine). Among them, over 1.26 million persons had received their first dose of vaccine, accounting for 19.3 per cent of the population aged 16 or above.

As at the same day, out of the two million odd doses each of the Sinovac and Comirnaty vaccine which have arrived in Hong Kong (Note 2), there are 1.05 million and 840 000 unused doses respectively. The Comirnaty vaccine needs to be stored in an ultra-low temperature setting and the vaccines have a relatively short expiry date from the date of manufacture (around three to four months after arrival in Hong Kong). The Comirnaty vaccines now in storage will expire in mid-August this year. If the quantity of uptake falls short of the quantity in storage, some of the precious vaccines will be wasted. We observed that the public's demand for the Comirnaty vaccine has gradually become sluggish recently. Compared with the daily capacity of over 40 000 doses in Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs), there are only on average around 10 000 persons per day to make online bookings for receiving their first and second doses of the Comirnaty vaccine.

To avoid wastage amid tight global supply, the Government will, based on the vaccination and appointment trends, estimate the quantity of vaccines that may become excessive, and discuss with the drug manufacturers on how to handle the expected surplus doses which will be unused in this year's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme or before the expiry date of the vaccines, including postponing or cancelling delivery of certain batches or donating them to places which are more in need of the vaccines through channels such as the World Health Organization COVAX Facility. As it takes time for the production of vaccines, quality control, and transport and logistics, etc, even if the demand for vaccines by members of the public suddenly surges later on, it would not be possible for the relevant vaccines to be replenished within this year.

"Vaccination is not only the most effective and thorough measure for preventing and controlling COVID-19 but also the key to overcoming the epidemic, resuming normal ways of life and early resumption of cross-boundary travel as early as possible. We call on members of the public not to delay

and get vaccinated as soon as possible while current stock lasts and the service capacity is still sufficient at the CVCs," the spokesman added.

Note 1: Each person should receive two doses.

Note 2: The two million odd doses of Comirnaty vaccine that have arrived in Hong Kong do not include the 1.19 million odd doses that had to be returned to the German manufacturer BioNTech due to packaging defects.