Government responds to use of COVID-19 vaccines

A Government spokesman said on March 17, the Government has noticed that individual organisations used the name of medical professionals to claim that the Sinovac vaccine has insufficient data, thus shaking public confidence in vaccination. The spokesman pointed out, all COVID-19 vaccines used in Hong Kong are authorised for emergency use in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Use of Vaccines) Regulation (Cap. 599K) (the Regulation) in order to ensure that the relevant vaccines meet the requirements of safety, efficacy and quality.

The spokesman stressed that vaccination is an important public health measure to control COVID-19 effectively. The public health authorities have all along been implementing the vaccination programme based on scientific evidence and in adherence to the principles of openness and transparency, providing members of the public with the choice of vaccines from different technology platforms. Faced with the raging epidemic, the community should work together to fight the virus. We encourage citizens to actively get vaccinated so as to protect themselves, their families, the healthcare system, and even the whole population. Medical professionals should, following the spirit of protecting public health and the principle of adhering to medical evidence, explain to the public the benefits and risks of getting vaccinated. No political considerations should be involved. Individual organisations which used the name of medical professionals to, based on political stance, spread rumours to the public regarding vaccination and target individual vaccines attempting to smear the vaccination programme and mislead citizens to resist getting vaccinated are placing individual political gains on top of public health. Such behaviour should be condemned.

In accordance with the Regulation, the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH), after making reference to the advice of the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines (Advisory Panel) and having considered the threat to public health posed by COVID-19, considers that the authorisation of the Sinovac vaccine is necessary and in the public interest. SFH has authorised the emergency use of the relevant vaccine in Hong Kong according to the Regulation.

According to the information provided by Sinovac to the Advisory Panel, in the Phase 3 clinical trials conducted in Brazil (mainly targeting around 12 000 healthcare workers aged above 18, including around 600 elders aged above 60, who have contact with COVID-19 patients), for the around 10 000 trial participants who received two doses of the Sinovac vaccine, the overall vaccine efficacy was 50.65 per cent after 14 days. The results indicated that, in the clinical trials, comparing subjects who received the vaccine and those who did not, receiving the vaccine could lower the risk of developing symptomatic COVID-19 by 50.65 per cent. The above analysis encompassed only groups who experienced mild symptoms without the need for medical attention. As regards the groups who experienced symptoms and required medical attention or had more severe conditions, the efficacy of the Sinovac vaccine was 83.7

per cent. The efficacy for preventing hospitalisation and serious cases involving severe conditions or even death reached 100 per cent. However, the relevant case numbers are relatively fewer, hence further study would be necessary for confirmation.

The procedures for the Advisory Panel to examine the information and data and the Government to approve the authorisation are stringent and comprehensive. The procedures met all the relevant requirements under the Regulation and were no different from those adopted for approving another vaccine for emergency use in Hong Kong (Comirnaty) earlier.

As regards the use of the Sinovac vaccine on people aged 60 or above, according to the information provided by Sinovac, the Sinovac vaccine was suitable for preventive vaccination for people aged 18 or above. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (Joint Scientific Committee) under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) and the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel examined the available information and data having regard to the information provided by Sinovac to the Advisory Panel. They considered that the benefit of using Sinovac vaccine generally exceeds the risk of not using any vaccines in persons aged 60 or above.

According to the information provided by the drug manufacturer, so far over 40 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine have been administered around the world. According to statistics derived from the clinical trials of the Sinovac vaccine, so far there is no evidence indicating a direct causal relationship between receiving the relevant vaccine and a number of very severe adverse events such as death cases. As regards the severe adverse events in Hong Kong which occurred after receiving COVID-19 vaccines, in accordance with the DH’s pharmacovigilance system, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation (Expert Committee) will conduct causality assessments on all important adverse events based on guidelines by the World Health Organization when necessary information for the cases is available. So far, the assessment results of the Expert Committee have not indicated any causal relationship between death cases and the administration of vaccines. Put in simple terms, from the medical professional and science perspectives, so far there is no evidence pointing to the need for us to cast doubt on the safety of the two COVID-19 vaccines now made available to citizens. The relevant vaccines are effective and of good quality.