

Latest COVID-19 XBB vaccination arrangements announced

The Government today (March 25) announced the latest COVID-19 vaccination arrangements for XBB mRNA vaccine (XBB vaccine). Starting from March 27, all persons aged 6 months or above who are still not vaccinated or have not yet completed initial doses, may receive XBB vaccine as their initial vaccination to replace ancestral strain vaccines and bivalent vaccine.

Vaccination arrangements for high-risk priority groups

According to the earlier recommendation by the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (JSC) under the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health, for high-risk priority groups, a booster dose is recommended to be given at least six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later), regardless of the number of doses received previously. High-risk priority groups currently may receive XBB vaccine as a choice for initial and booster vaccination.

High-risk priority groups include persons aged 50 or above including those living in residential care homes, adults aged 18 to 49 with underlying comorbidities, persons aged 6 months or above with immunocompromising conditions, pregnant women and healthcare workers.

Initial vaccination arrangements for non high-risk priority groups

The JSC earlier recommended that XBB vaccine to be extended to the initial vaccination of non high-risk priority groups. Non high-risk priority groups are only required to receive initial vaccination but do not require booster vaccination.

After reviewing the current supply for XBB vaccine, the Government will extend XBB vaccination to non high-risk priority groups for initial vaccination from March 27. In other words, all persons aged 6 months or above who are still not vaccinated or have not yet completed initial doses may choose to receive XBB vaccine as their initial vaccination. The Government online booking system (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk/forms/index.jsp) will be updated at 9am on March 27 to facilitate XBB vaccination for eligible members of the public to receive XBB vaccine. For the list of venues providing XBB vaccination, please visit (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/xbb_venues_dec2023_eng.pdf). For people who have made an online booking to receive other vaccines, XBB vaccines will be provided to complete their initial vaccination in venues offering XBB vaccination services.

Vaccine supply (including introducing XBB toddler and paediatric formulation)

The JSC considered that XBB vaccines could provide enhanced protection against JN.1, which has become the predominant COVID-19 variant in Hong Kong. The Government has launched the XBB vaccination arrangement since December 14 last year and has procured about 200 000 doses relevant vaccines. As at yesterday (March 24), about 126 000 of them have been administered. Also, the Government has recently procured some additional 14 000 doses of XBB toddler and paediatric formulation (i.e. 9 600 doses of Comirnaty Omicron XBB.1.5 toddler formulation and 4 800 doses of paediatric formulation). The vaccines have arrived in Hong Kong and will be administered as initial doses or booster doses starting from March 27. The Government will continue its close monitoring on the demand for XBB vaccines and ensure a sufficient vaccine supply for the public.

Meanwhile, the JSC agreed that that all available COVID-19 vaccines in Hong Kong, including inactivated virus and mRNA vaccines, are effective in reducing death and severe COVID-19 infection. Members of the public may choose to receive an available COVID-19 vaccine based on personal choice.

The CHP pointed out that the overall local COVID-19 activity is still high. Surveillance data revealed that the positive detection rate in early March (March 3 to 16) has exceeded the level recorded in the past six months. During the same period, the weekly number of severe cases including deaths with cause of death preliminarily assessed to be related to COVID-19 was over 50, which has also exceeded the level of about 30 cases weekly earlier this year. The CHP appealed to members of the public to complete their initial doses and high-risk groups to receive booster doses. The Private Clinic COVID-19 Vaccination Stations currently provide ample time slots of free XBB vaccination for eligible persons. For available booking time slots of various vaccination outlets, please visit booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk/centre/index.html.

â€‹Details of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme can be found at the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106934.html).