

LCQ10: Human papillomavirus vaccination programme

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 20):

Question:

The Government announced in 2018 the expansion of the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme (HKCIP) to incorporate the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme for the prevention of cervical cancer. Starting from the 2019-2020 school year, Primary Five and Primary Six female students may respectively receive the first dose and the second dose of HPV vaccine free of charge. It is learnt that as schools across the territory suspended classes on a number of occasions last year due to the epidemic, the implementation of the HPV vaccination programme has been affected, and not until October last year did the Department of Health complete the administration of the first dose of HPV vaccine to all female students. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of schools across the territory participating in the HPV vaccination programme, and the up-to-date number of Primary Five female students who have received such vaccination;
- (2) as it is learnt that the immunisation coverage rate of primary school students under HKCIP has been as high as 97 per cent, how such coverage rate compares to the relevant figure of HPV vaccination programme;
- (3) as it is learnt that some schools have requested students to return to school to receive HPV vaccination during the period of class suspension, whether it has assessed the impact of this arrangement on the HPV vaccination coverage rate;
- (4) as the Hong Kong Cancer Strategy 2019 announced by the Government has stated an interim target immunisation coverage rate of 70 per cent for completion of the administration of two doses of HPV vaccine to the first cohort of eligible female students, whether the present uptake rate has reached the target; and
- (5) as the US Food and Drug Administration has recently approved the use of nine-valent HPV vaccine for the prevention of oropharynx cancer as well as other head and neck cancers caused by HPV, whether the Government will expand the HPV vaccination programme to cover male students and other female students of suitable ages under 18, so as to reduce the incidence of the relevant cancers as soon as possible; if so, of the relevant plan; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that according to the recommendations of the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) and the Scientific Committee on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (SCAS) in mid-2018, the Government would, starting from the 2019/20 school year, introduce free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination to school girls of particular age groups as a public health strategy for prevention of cervical cancer.

The Government promulgated the Hong Kong Cancer Strategy in July 2019 with a view to reducing the cancer burden of the local population and improving the quality of life and survivorship of cancer patients through setting work priorities and directions. Phased outcomes in the relevant aspects, including the interim target of 70 per cent coverage for completion of two doses of HPV vaccination among the first cohort, are expected to be achieved by 2025. The target will be reviewed after the first two years of implementation.

In consultation with the Department of Health (DH), I provide a consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Elizabeth Quat as follows:

(1), (2) and (4) Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the DH has provided HPV vaccination to Primary 5 and 6 female students under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme (HKCIP) to prevent cervical cancer. The first dose of HPV vaccine will be given via outreach by the DH's School Immunisation Teams (SITs) to Primary 5 female students at their schools, and a second dose will be given to the girls when they reach Primary 6 in the following school year.

In the 2019/20 school year, a total of 594 primary schools in the territory participated in the DH's HPV vaccination programme. As at December 31, 2020, about 24 200 Primary 5 female students of these primary schools have received the first dose of HPV vaccine and the uptake rate is 85 per cent. The vaccination service is ongoing.

(3) During the period of suspension of face-to-face classes, schools may arrange school activities for students according to the guidelines of the Education Bureau. The SITs have been maintaining close liaison with school staff and arrange school outreach vaccination activities following the "Health Advice to Schools for the Prevention of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) (Interim)" issued by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP). In case school outreach vaccination activities cannot be arranged or female students are unable to return to school due to suspension of face-to-face classes, the DH staff will contact the parents of the students concerned via the schools to make appointments for vaccination at SIT offices.

(5) In general, incorporation of a new vaccine into the HKCIP is based on

scientific evidence taking into account a number of public health factors, including the overall disease burden on society, the efficacy and safety of the vaccine, the availability of other effective preventive measures, and the cost-effectiveness and public acceptance of the vaccine.

After reviewing the scientific evidence, recommendations from the World Health Organization and overseas experiences in relation to the efficacy and safety of HPV vaccines, as well as local studies on acceptability and cost-benefit analyses, the SCVPD and the SCAS (the Scientific Committees) under the CHP of the DH have reached a consensus and made a joint recommendation in September 2018 that HPV vaccination be included in the HKCIP for girls of suitable ages before sexual debut as one of the public health strategies for prevention of cervical cancer.

The Scientific Committees under the CHP will continue to keep abreast of local and overseas scientific developments and cost-benefit analyses in respect of HPV vaccines, and make recommendations regarding the HKCIP from the public health perspective for the CHP's reference in reviewing and updating the HKCIP.