

LCQ12: Encouraging members of public to get vaccinated

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (July 7):

Question:

It has been reported that quite a number of members of the public are hesitant about receiving the Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccines (the vaccines), the causes of which include their concerns about severe post-vaccination adverse reactions and a reduction in income due to the need to stop working temporarily as a result of the side effects of the vaccines. On encouraging members of the public to get vaccinated, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether, apart from the consultation on vaccination currently provided by the general outpatient clinics under the Hospital Authority, the Government will provide simple physical check-ups (e.g. blood tests) free of charge for those members of the public who are willing to get vaccinated but are not sure if, given their health conditions, it is suitable for them to do so, with a view to allaying their concerns; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the measures in place to spur employers to provide their employees with paid leave, so as to incentivise members of the public to get vaccinated;

(3) whether it has set a deadline for the provision of free vaccination services; if so, of such deadline, and whether members of the public will need to pay for receiving the vaccines after the deadline; and

(4) whether it will provide mobile vaccination vehicle service and step up the existing outreach vaccination service (e.g. by lowering the minimum number of people receiving the vaccines as required for the service) so that members of the public may get vaccinated more conveniently; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government launched the "Early Vaccination for All" campaign with an aim to building an immune barrier in Hong Kong as soon as possible by significantly raising the vaccination rate during the critical period from now until the end of August, thereby restoring normality to society sooner rather than later.

In response to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Chiang Lai-wan, a reply from the Food and Health Bureau and the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), which are in charge of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (the Vaccination Programme), is as follows:

(1) The Government has been following the principles of openness, transparency, accuracy and timeliness and adopted a science-based approach for information dissemination, promotion and education. Through different channels, we disseminate to members of the public the benefits and correct information on vaccination and the views of experts.

To provide the public a one-stop destination to learn about the latest information on COVID-19 vaccines, the Government has launched the Vaccination Programme thematic website to explain the principles of the vaccines, their protection and need-to-know facts, and more. We have also added new features to the thematic website and set up a data dashboard to publish latest information regarding vaccination, including the number of doses administered and remaining days of operation of Community Vaccination Centres. Furthermore, the Department of Health (DH) has produced a large amount of materials delivered via different media channels for promotion of the benefits of vaccination and urge members of the public to get vaccinated. We understand that science-based evidence is particularly important. The DH therefore invited family doctors to participate in informative programmes to assess whether different cases are suitable for receiving vaccines. For example, the DH collaborated with the Hospital Authority and Radio Television Hong Kong for several weeks, through the programme "Vaccine Line", to explain whether different illnesses will affect the effectiveness and safety of COVID-19 vaccination. The programme also answers public enquiries so that members of the public would feel at ease about getting vaccinated. The DH has also collaborated with relevant stakeholders to organise health talks on COVID-19 vaccines, including working with various non-government organisations to conduct online health talks in ethnic minority languages, and having healthcare workers answer enquiries on COVID-19 vaccines by participants.

As regards healthcare providers, the DH has issued guidelines (Note 1) to doctors participating in the Vaccination Programme and conducted seminars to explain the content of the Vaccination Programme and the arrangements for vaccination, and more. Furthermore, the DH has also developed and promulgated the "Interim Guidance Notes On Common Medical Diseases and COVID-19 Vaccination in Primary Care Settings" (Note 2) to provide healthcare workers with health guidance on handling different target groups and administration of vaccines. The DH has also invited doctors to assist in the production of short clips and messages for dissemination on social media and other media platforms, with a view to enhancing the vaccination rate of COVID-19 vaccines.

Currently, the Comirnaty and Sinovac vaccines being used in Hong Kong have already been administered on a large scale around the world. With the accumulation of data on efficacy and safety, more and more evidence indicated

that the vaccines are safe and very efficacious, especially in the prevention of serious infection and death. We understand that some people with chronic diseases may be hesitant to get vaccinated due to concerns over the possible side effects, but in fact, people with chronic diseases are more vulnerable to develop severe disease and even mortality from COVID-19 infection. Therefore, unless with contraindications, these relevant persons should get vaccinated for personal protection. Generally speaking, chronic disease patients who are in stable condition, as well as those who have recovered, in remission or the disease is already under control can be vaccinated. People with history of severe allergies should first consult their family doctor before getting the vaccination.

(2) To encourage government employees to receive COVID-19 vaccination as early as possible, the CSB announced the "Vaccination Leave" arrangement on May 31, 2021. Government employees are entitled to a day of authorised absence for each vaccination dose received before August 31, 2021 so that they can have sufficient time to recuperate after getting vaccinated. Government employees who were vaccinated on or before May 31 this year, in recognition and appreciation of their support for the Vaccination Programme, are also allowed to apply for one day of authorised absence for each dose already received. Quite a number of private enterprises have introduced similar measures. We encourage employers of other enterprises to consider the needs of their staff and provide facilitation, where practicable, to their staff to receive vaccination.

(3) Our goal is to provide COVID-19 vaccines for the majority of the Hong Kong population within this year through the Vaccination Programme led by the Government. Members of the public can receive the vaccines on a voluntary basis free of charge. Vaccination is not only the most effective and thorough measure for preventing and controlling the epidemic, but it is also the key to overcoming the epidemic, resuming normal ways of life and resumption of cross-boundary travel as early as possible. We appeal to those who have not yet received vaccination to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and others, and to build up the herd immunity barrier for Hong Kong.

(4) There has been enthusiastic support from various sectors for the outreach vaccination programme since it was launched by the CSB. So far, the CSB has provided outreach vaccination service to the Hong Kong Sports Institute, global professional services enterprises, property developers, financial institutions, the construction industry and public transport companies. The CSB is now proactively in discussions with enterprises and groups from various sectors, including post-secondary institutions, public utilities and theme parks, on the feasibility of providing the outreach vaccination service to them. For primary and secondary schools, in addition to outreach vaccination service, the CSB also provides bus transport service to take teachers, parents and students to and from Community Vaccination Centres to get vaccinated.

Note 1: www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/pdf/VSS_DoctorsGuide.pdf

Note 2: www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/pdf/Guidance_Notes.pdf