

LCQ15: Supply of Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccines

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 23):

Question:

To cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, the Government will fully implement the "vaccine pass" starting from the 24th of this month. By then, members of the public will be required to have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine (vaccine) and present their vaccination records before they may enter the scheduled premises specified under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). On the supply of vaccines, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective current stocks of the Sinovac and BioNTech vaccines, and whether the stocks are sufficient for the Government to achieve the goal of administering at least two doses of vaccine to all members of the public;
- (2) whether it has formulated measures to help members of the public overcome the psychological resistance to getting vaccinated, and encourage the elderly and children to get vaccinated (such as providing them with more efficient vaccination services); if so, of the details;
- (3) whether it has plans to update the definition of "completing a vaccination course"; if so, of the details, as well as the vaccination rate needed to be achieved (and the additional amount of vaccine doses needed to be procured); and
- (4) whether it has started procuring second-generation vaccines that can target the Omicron mutant strain; if so, how it will avoid wasting the first-generation vaccines procured?

Reply:

President,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented and severe impact on the world. Vaccination is the most effective measure to stop the spread of the virus and prevent severe cases, hospitalisation and death. The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme led by the Government was launched in February last year to provide members of the public with two safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, namely the Comirnaty and CoronaVac vaccines.

The newly enacted Prevention and Control of Disease (Vaccine Pass)

Regulation (Cap. 599L) provides a legislative framework enabling the Secretary for Food and Health to make a Vaccine Pass direction in order to specify the application of Vaccine Pass in relation to any category of premises and public transport. The Vaccine Pass arrangement will be implemented in all catering business premises and scheduled premises under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) from February 24.

In consultation with the Social Welfare Department, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by Hon Lai Tung-kwok is as follows:

(1), (3) and (4) Since the implementation of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the Government has procured a total of 7.5 million and 8.5 million doses of the CoronaVac and Comirnaty vaccines respectively. The quantity is sufficient for us to provide the first and second dose vaccine (primary doses) to all citizens of Hong Kong. In view that the current formulation of the CoronaVac and Comirnaty vaccine can be used for primary doses and third dose booster, we have made flexible arrangements to deploy some stock for primary doses to be used as the third dose, in order to provide the third dose booster for members of the public who are eligible. In response to the increased demand of the public for vaccination, we have procured from the drug manufacturers enough additional doses to meet the expected requirements for third dose vaccination.

Vaccine developers are now working at full steam to develop new generation vaccines which are more efficacious and can better protect against new variants. The Government has all along been closely monitoring the overall development of COVID-19 vaccines and the epidemic situation worldwide and keeping close liaison with the drug manufacturers. Having regard to scientific evidence and clinical data, we will continue to procure sufficient doses of safe and efficacious vaccines as far as possible and will also consult the advice of the Joint Scientific Committees and expert advisory panel. We expect that around 6.03 billion is required for meeting the expenditure for vaccine procurement (including booster) and implementing the next round vaccination programme. We will earmark the above funding in the budget estimates of the financial year concerned for meeting the relevant non-recurrent expenditure.

As far as the CoronaVac and Comirnaty vaccines are concerned, the definition of "completing a vaccination course" generally means having received two doses of the vaccine at least 14 days before. We will continue to keep in view the vaccination situation in Hong Kong and the development of the epidemic. We will also make reference to the practices and experience overseas and update the definition of "completing a vaccination course" when the need arises.

(2) To combat the epidemic, the Government has been strongly appealing to and encouraging the public to get vaccinated, with a view to protecting the community by increasing the vaccination rate in Hong Kong. The current epidemic situation is of grave concern, and death and severe cases involving children and elderly persons have been recorded. Children and elderly persons

are our focus of protection. We actively provide multiple channels to encourage and enable them to get vaccinated as early as possible so as to reduce the risk of serious illness and death from infection.

Arrangements for children to receive vaccination

For arrangements for children to receive COVID-19 vaccines, having regard to the advice of the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines, the Secretary for Food and Health has earlier approved the eligibility of receiving the CoronaVac vaccine to cover individuals aged 3 and above. We gave priority to vaccinating those aged 12 to 17 with the CoronaVac vaccine earlier, and gradually expanded the coverage to children aged 5 to 11, and then children aged 3 to 4. Apart from parents making reservations for their children to get vaccinated at Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) (including the CVC at Hong Kong Central Library designated to provide the CoronaVac vaccine to people aged 3 to 17) or private clinics, the Government also provides special appointments for schools and transport services to arrange for students to get vaccinated at CVCs or Student Health Service Centres, and to provide outreach vaccination service at schools to facilitate children to receive the CoronaVac vaccine.

As for the Comirnaty vaccine, having reviewed the relevant efficacy and safety data published, the Advisory Panel suggested allowing children aged 5 to 11 to receive a fractional dose (i.e. one-third of a dose) of the Comirnaty vaccine for adults for "off-label use". The Joint Scientific Committee also did not object to the relevant arrangement. According to recommendations by experts, an interval of 12 weeks is required for children to receive the first and the second doses of the vaccine. In view of the special dilution procedure required for providing children with the Comirnaty vaccine, three Children Community Vaccination Centres (CCVCs) have begun to provide services by phase, namely the CCVCs located at Hong Kong Children's Hospital and at the multi-purpose arena on the first floor of Yuen Chau Kok Sports Centre operated by the Hospital Authority (HA) (came into service on February 16), as well as the CCVC at Gleneagles Hospital operated by the University of Hong Kong (will come into service on February 24).

Additional CVC dedicated for elderly and children to receive CoronaVac vaccine

To enable more elderly persons, children and teenagers to receive COVID-19 vaccination as early as possible, the Government has set up a dedicated CVC at Hong Kong Central Library on February 23 to provide CoronaVac vaccination service for persons aged 3 to 17 and those aged 60 or above. Meanwhile, the distribution of same-day tickets at CVCs has been limited to eligible persons aged 60 or above starting from January 11 to reserve the quota as far as possible for elderly who are not familiar with online reservations.

Mobile Vaccination Station

Furthermore, two mobile vaccination stations (MVSs) shuttling between

various housing estates and locations have been set up to provide Comirnaty and CoronaVac vaccines. The MVSs enable people in the district, in particular elderly persons, to receive COVID-19 vaccine conveniently. Members of the public can walk-in to receive the first, second or third dose vaccine at the MVSs, or make prior booking through a hotline to reduce waiting time. The MVSs also provide vaccination services at secondary schools for students and staff members of schools.

Assess and Vaccinate Programme for residential care homes

To encourage unvaccinated residents to receive early vaccination so as to reduce their risk of falling seriously ill and death upon infection, the Government launched a pilot programme called the Assess and Vaccinate Programme in 10 residential care homes (RCHs) covering residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) on September 29, 2021. The pilot programme was later extended to all RCHEs and RCHDs in Hong Kong on October 25, 2021 (the Programme). Under the Programme, arrangements are made for unvaccinated residents to have health assessments by visiting medical officers (VMOs) arranged by RCHs or health maintenance organisations (HMOs) arranged by the Government. Upon confirmation that a resident is suitable for receiving vaccination, and that his/her family members do not clearly oppose vaccination and confirmed that they understand the risks posed to the resident, other residents and staff of the RCH by the resident not being vaccinated, the COVID-19 vaccine would be administered to the resident by VMOs or HMOs under the informed consent of the resident or his/her legal guardian, so as to give early protection to him/her. During the period, VMOs or HMOs also provide health talks/health consultation to residents and their families in need so that they can better understand the vaccine effectiveness to allay their concerns. From the launch of the Programme in late September 2021 to February 20, 2022, about 13 000 RCH residents in Hong Kong have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine through outreach services.

In response to the recent worsening epidemic situation, in order to protect residents and staff, the Government has made arrangements with VMOs and HMOs to give priority to providing services to RCHs. In addition, the Government has also mobilised and organised more medical professionals in the field and simplified the process of health assessment and vaccination, so as to conduct health assessment and vaccination for residents as soon as possible.

Elderly Health Centres

From January 13 to February 28, 15 Elderly Health Centres (EHCs) (Note 1) under the Department of Health (DH) provide CoronaVac vaccination service to all elderly aged 65 or above on a walk-in basis from Monday to Saturday (excluding public holidays). No prior booking is required. The other three EHCs (Note 2) will continue to provide CoronaVac vaccination service to their members on a walk-in basis on the following days. No prior booking is required.

Yau Ma Tei EHC	Opens on Thursday only
Tai Po EHC	Opens on Tuesday and Friday only
Tuen Mun Wu Hong EHC	Opens on Monday and Wednesday only

District Health Centres and District Health Centres Expresses

District Health Centres (DHC) and DHC Expresses under the Food and Health Bureau have been actively promoting and taking part in anti-epidemic work at district level. Apart from promoting and encouraging the public to receive vaccination and providing related education through on-site and on-line means, DHC and DHC Expresses also assist those in need, especially the elderly, in making appointments for vaccination at CVCs, MVSs, private doctors / clinics etc. At the same time, in response to local demand for COVID-19 vaccination, DHCs and DHC Expresses also collaborate with medical practitioners in the community to render outreach vaccination service at DHCs/DHC Expresses.

Health consultation and publicity activities

In support of the Government's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the HA's General Out-patient Clinics (GOPCs) have all along been providing advice to patients who intend to receive COVID-19 vaccination but are in doubt of their suitability for receiving COVID-19 vaccination. To further enhance the service, since June 25, 2021, all 73 GOPCs under the HA have been offering additional assessment sessions to chronic patients with regular follow-up appointments at GOPCs who intend to receive COVID-19 vaccination but are in doubt of their suitability. Doctors will assess the clinical conditions of the patients to aid them in making decision on vaccination.

On the other hand, from August 2021 to the end of 2021, District Offices and non-governmental organisations organised about 50 vaccination events offering one-stop services covering health talk, health consultation and on-site vaccination. Over 10 000 members of the public and elderly residents participated in these events.

In terms of health promotion, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) under the DH disseminates information on vaccination through newspapers, promotional videos, websites and social media platforms, etc. to facilitate the elderly to obtain the latest information. At the same time, the CHP has also prepared leaflets to distribute through different channels, calling on the elderly to get vaccinated as soon as possible in order to protect themselves and their families.

We have noticed that the COVID-19 vaccination rate among the elderly has been increasing since the beginning of January. Over 72 per cent of the

elderly aged 70 to 79 has received their first dose of the vaccine, and the vaccination rate for the elderly aged 80 and above has increased to 43 per cent as well.

Note 1: Namely Sai Ying Pun EHC, Shau Kei Wan EHC, Aberdeen EHC, Wan Chai EHC, Kowloon City EHC, Lam Tin EHC, Nam Shan EHC, San Po Kong EHC (relocated to Kowloon City Lions Clubs Student Health Service Centre starting from February 16, 2022), Tung Chung EHC, Kwai Shing EHC, Shek Wu Hui EHC, Tseung Kwan O EHC, Lek Yuen EHC, Tsuen Wan EHC and Yuen Long EHC.

Note 2: Namely Yau Ma Tei EHC, Tai Po EHC and Tuen Mun Wu Hong EHC.