

LCQ21: Seasonal influenza vaccination

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Pierre Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

The Department of Health (DH) introduced in October last year the School Outreach Vaccination Pilot Programme under which outreach teams went to various schools to provide free seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) for primary school students. In October this year, DH regularised the Programme and extended, on a pilot basis, the Programme to kindergartens and child care centres. In addition, under the Enhanced Vaccination Subsidy Scheme Outreach Vaccination, schools may invite the participating doctors published on DH's website to provide free SIV for their students at their schools. On the other hand, DH provides respectively free and subsidised SIV to eligible groups through the Government Vaccination Programme and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of (a) primary schools and (b) kindergartens/child care centres which have participated in (i) the School Outreach Vaccination Programme and (ii) the Enhanced Vaccination Subsidy Scheme Outreach Vaccination, since the beginning of the current school year, as well as the relevant details; the respective numbers of school children who have and who have not received SIV, and how the relevant school children uptake rate compares with that of the same period last year;

(2) of (i) the amount of expenditure incurred by the Government for procuring seasonal influenza vaccines and (ii) the total amount of subsidy claimed by the private doctors participating in the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, in each of the past five years;

(3) of the number of persons in each of the groups set out in the table below who received SIV and the uptake rate, in each of the past five years (set out separately in tables of the same format as the table below);

Year:

Group	Number of persons who received vaccination	Uptake rate
Children between six months and under six years old		
Children aged between six and under 12		
Persons aged between 12 and under 50		

Persons aged between 50 and under 65		
Persons aged 65 or above		
Pregnant women		
Persons with chronic health problems		
Overall population		

(4) of (i) the quantity of nasal seasonal influenza vaccines procured by DH and the amount of expenditure so incurred, as well as (ii) the respective numbers of persons from the various groups set out in the aforesaid table who received such vaccines, since April last year; whether it will consider using more of such nasal vaccines in providing SIV for children;

(5) of the respective (i) quantities of seasonal influenza vaccines procured by DH and the Hospital Authority (HA), and amounts of money involved, as well as (ii) quantities of unused but expired or damaged seasonal influenza vaccines which were discarded by DH and HA, and amounts of money involved and relevant procedure, in each of the past five years; and

(6) whether the Government will consider subsidising all members of the community for receiving SIV; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Vaccination is one of the effective means to prevent seasonal influenza (SI) and its complications. It also reduces the risks of flu-associated in-patient admission and mortality. Therefore, the Government has all along been encouraging the public to receive vaccination as early as possible. In 2019/20, free or subsidised seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) is provided for eligible groups under the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP), the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) and the 2019/20 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) (School Outreach (Free of Charge)). To enhance the uptake rate among school children, the Department of Health (DH) has regularised the School Outreach Vaccination Pilot Programme in 2019/20 to cover more primary schools, and extended the coverage to kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres as a pilot programme. The DH also actively co-ordinates with schools and private doctors to organise outreach SIV activities in schools. In consultation with the DH, the reply to the six parts of the question is as follows:

(1) As at November 24, 2019, a total of 431 primary schools and 706 kindergartens/kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres participated in the School Outreach (Free of Charge), while a total of 107 primary schools and 51 kindergartens/kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres provided outreach SIV under the VSS (School

Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed)). As at November 24, 2019, about 229 000 children aged between six months and under 12 received SIV under various government vaccination schemes, representing an uptake rate of 33.5 per cent. The uptake figure is comparable to that of the corresponding period last year.

(2) The expenditure incurred by the DH for procuring SI vaccines under various government vaccination schemes, and for subsidising vaccination provided by private doctors under the VSS in the past five years are detailed in Annex 1.

(3) The number of persons in each eligible group who received SIV under various government vaccination schemes and their uptake rates in the past five years are detailed in Annex 2. Since some people from the eligible groups might have received SIV through arrangements other than government vaccination schemes, the figures related to these persons are not reflected in Annex 2.

(4) As nasal SI vaccines have not been widely used in Hong Kong, and having regard to their supply, the DH has provided this type of vaccine for some of the schools served by its outreach teams in 2019/20 to test the feasibility and logistical arrangements in applying such vaccines under various vaccination schemes. A total of 2 000 nasal vaccine doses were procured in 2019/20, involving an expenditure of \$380,000. As at November 24, 2019, over 600 primary school children and 500 children from kindergartens/ kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres have received nasal vaccination. The DH will review the experience in the trial and consider whether such vaccines should be used in the future, taking into account factors such as their supply and acceptance rate.

(5) The DH is responsible for procuring SI vaccines under the GVP and the School Outreach Vaccination Programme (Note). SI vaccines used by the Hospital Authority under the GVP are procured and allocated by the DH. In general, the product life of SI vaccine can last for one year and expired vaccines will not be used. Unused but expired or damaged vaccines are arranged for disposal in phases in accordance with the statutory requirements. In the past five years, the cost involved in the disposal of these vaccines has been included in the expenditure for procuring vaccines under various vaccination schemes (see Annex 1). The quantities of SI vaccines procured and the number of doses of unused but expired or damaged vaccines under various vaccination schemes in the past five years are detailed in Annex 3.

Note: Including all participating primary schools and a small number of kindergartens/ kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres under the School Outreach (Free of Charge) which DH provides outreach vaccination services.

(6) Certain groups of people are at higher risk of catching severe influenza or transmitting influenza to those at high risk, and should be given higher priority for SIV. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases

under the Centre for Health Protection examines from time to time local epidemiological data, latest scientific evidence and overseas experiences, and reviews the recommendations regarding the priority groups for SIV. Every year, the Government will make reference to the recommendations from the Scientific Committee, practices of overseas health authorities, other public health factors and the affordability of people receiving vaccination, etc. in order to designate the eligible groups under the VSS and the GVP and consider whether there is a need to expand the target groups of relevant scheme. For example, the Government has expanded the eligible groups of the VSS to cover people aged between 50 and 64 since 2018/19.