

LCQ8: Influenza vaccination coverage rates

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 11):

Question:

It has been reported that due to worries about the serious conditions arising from dual infections with coronavirus disease 2019 and influenza, members of the public are more enthusiastic, as compared with the situations in previous years, about receiving seasonal influenza vaccines (SIV) at private healthcare institutions in recent days. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) among the 878 000 doses of SIV that the Government has planned to purchase in this financial year, of the respective numbers of doses reserved for various groups;
- (2) of the influenza vaccination coverage rates so far, as well as the original and the latest estimated final coverage rates; and
- (3) of the plans in place to further boost the influenza vaccination coverage rates across Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. Given that influenza vaccines are safe and effective, all persons aged six months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive seasonal influenza vaccines (SIV) for personal protection. In consultation with the Department of Health (DH), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Leung Che-cheung is as follows:

- (1) Each year, with reference to the recommendations by the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD), free or subsidised SIV is provided for eligible persons under the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP), the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) and the SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge). A new eligible group has been added under the GVP and the VSS in 2020/21 season to cover the recipients of standard rate of "100% disabled" or "requiring constant attendance" under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.

Before ordering influenza vaccines for the annual seasonal vaccination

programmes, the Government will make estimates based on the number of persons eligible for the programmes during the season and the uptake rates in the past, etc. The procurement arrangement for influenza vaccines for the 2020/2021 season vaccination programmes is largely the same as that in last year. The DH has procured a total of 878 000 doses of inactivated influenza vaccines for the 2020/21 season vaccination programmes, comprising 628 000 doses for the GVP and 250 000 doses for the "SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) – Primary Schools" for eligible high-risk groups to receive SIV free-of-charge in phases. In line with established arrangements, the influenza vaccines for VSS and "SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) – Kindergartens/Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres/Child Care Centres" will be procured by the participating doctors.

(2) In 2020/21 season, as at November 8, 2020, about 670 387 eligible persons have received SIV under various vaccination programmes. The Government has all along been implementing various measures to enhance the uptake rate for eligible groups and the entire population in Hong Kong, but did not set any target uptake rate for eligible groups. The uptake rates of the major eligible groups are as follows:

Eligible group	Uptake rate of the group (as at November 8, 2020)
Children aged between six months and under six	24.6%
Children aged between six and under 12	25.7%
Persons aged between 50 and 64	8.0%
Persons aged 65 or above	21.7%

(3) To further increase the vaccination uptake rate, the DH has continued to strengthen publicity and educational activities through different channels (including press releases, television/radio, interviews with experts, videos of key opinion leaders, advertisements, social media, thematic websites, Health Education Infoline, posters and pamphlets, etc.) to encourage members of the public, especially those from the high-risk groups, to receive vaccination, and to remind people of the possibly more severe condition due to coinfection of seasonal influenza and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, in order to reduce the risk of simultaneous outbreak of winter seasonal influenza and COVID-19, the public should receive vaccination early to enhance personal protection and alleviate the burden on the healthcare system.

In order to increase the uptake rate of people from the age group of 50 to 64, the DH would invite chambers of commerce/companies/organisations to encourage their members/staff in the age group of 50 to 64 to receive vaccination. Moreover, the DH would publicise the importance and arrangements

of vaccination to the organisations that serve the elderly. The DH would also disseminate information about the vaccination programmes to the elderly through different elderly websites and organisations, and make use of television/radio, etc. to let the elderly understand the arrangements of the programmes.

The Kwai Tsing District Health Centre has organised educational seminars to promote influenza vaccination at the district since October, and has co-operated with network doctors enrolled in the VSS outreach vaccination to provide free vaccination for its members and eligible persons in Kwai Tsing district, in order to encourage and facilitate members of the public to receive influenza vaccination.