

Public urged to support World Cancer Day 2022

The Department of Health (DH) today (February 4) urged members of the public to support World Cancer Day 2022 by adopting a healthy lifestyle and initiating early detection of disease.

World Cancer Day has been designated on February 4 every year by the Union for International Cancer Control since 2000 to increase community understanding of challenges posed by cancer and to bring the world together in the fight against the disease. Under the theme "Close the Care Gap", World Cancer Day 2022 is about envisioning a future where all people live healthier lives and have better access to healthcare services and cancer treatments.

Cancer is a major public health issue. In 2019, more than 35 000 new cancer cases were diagnosed in Hong Kong, and the five most common cancers were lung, colorectal, breast, prostate and liver cancers. In view of population growth and ageing, the number of new cancer cases and the related healthcare demands are expected to increase.

Prevention is better than cure. About 40 per cent of all cancers can be prevented by adopting a healthy lifestyle and reducing exposure to major risk factors. "We urge the public to avoid tobacco smoking, refrain from alcohol drinking, be physically active, have a balanced diet and maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference to reduce the risk of developing cancer," a spokesman for the DH advised. Health advice on prevention of various cancers is also available on the Cancer Online Resource Hub (www.cancer.gov.hk).

In addition to primary prevention, the Government adopts an evidence-based approach in regard to implementation of cancer screening, so as to achieve early diagnosis of cancer for initiating early treatment and thus improving treatment outcomes. In this connection, the DH has fully implemented screening programmes for cervical cancer and colorectal cancer, and has launched the Breast Cancer Screening Pilot Programme (BCSPP).

The Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme (CRCSP) subsidises asymptomatic Hong Kong residents aged between 50 and 75 to undergo screening tests for colorectal cancer. The Cervical Screening Programme (CSP) encourages women aged 25 to 64 who have had sexual experience to have regular cervical screening as an effective way of preventing cervical cancer. Moreover, the two-year BCSPP has been rolled out to provide risk-based breast cancer screening services for eligible women in the three Women Health Centres and the 18 Elderly Health Centres of the DH in September and December last year respectively. The Cancer Expert Working Group on Cancer Prevention and Screening recommends women aged between 44 and 69 with certain combinations of personalised risk factors that put them at increased risk of breast cancer to consider mammography screening every two years. Under the BCSPP, the DH uses the breast cancer risk assessment tool for local women

(www.cancer.gov.hk/bctool) to assess the risk of developing breast cancer.

The spokesman calls on the public to talk to their doctor to understand the benefits and limitations of screening tests before making an informed decision to undergo cancer screening. For more information, the public may visit the websites of the CRCSP (www.colonscreen.gov.hk) and the CSP (www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk). Details of the BCSP are available at the websites of Family Health Service (www.fhs.gov.hk) and Elderly Health Service (www.elderly.gov.hk).

The spokesman also reminds members of the public that while people of all ages can be infected with COVID-19, people with underlying chronic non-communicable diseases, including those with cancer, are particularly vulnerable to severe and fatal COVID-19 infection. COVID-19 vaccines are effective in reducing the risk of developing severe complications against and death from COVID-19 infection. Unless there is contraindication, members of the public, including people with cancer, should get COVID-19 vaccines as soon as possible for their personal protection. Generally speaking, if patients' cancer is in remission or they are not receiving active cancer treatment, their eligibility to receive COVID-19 vaccine is the same as for other people without cancer. People receiving active cancer treatment should discuss with their oncology doctor about the best timing to receive COVID-19 vaccine. It is recommended that the two doses of COVID-19 vaccination be completed either before the start or after the completion of any active cancer treatment (including chemotherapy, targeted therapy and/or immunotherapy). For more information about the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, including vaccination venues and making an online booking for vaccination, please visit www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en.

To know more about World Cancer Day, please visit www.worldcancerday.org.