

Scientific Committees under CHP publish consensus interim recommendations on use of CoronaVac vaccine in Hong Kong

The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (SCEZD) under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) (JSC) yesterday (February 19) published the consensus interim recommendations on the use of the CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine (CoronaVac) by Sinovac Biotech (Hong Kong) Limited (Sinovac) in Hong Kong .

The Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines (AP) has submitted its recommendations to the Secretary for Food and Health earlier on and considered that, under the current epidemic situation, the benefits of authorising the use of the COVID-19 vaccine by Sinovac for protecting against COVID-19 outweigh the risks. The AP recommended that the appropriateness of using CoronaVac in elderly of 60 years old or above should be advised by the JSC.

The JSC, convened a meeting yesterday, joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel (EAP), to provide interim recommendations to the Government on the use of CoronaVac in Hong Kong. Thus far, phase 3 clinical studies of CoronaVac have not been published in peer-reviewed journals. The JSC-EAP reviewed the data and information available, based on materials submitted to the AP by Sinovac.

The interim recommendation might be updated based on additional safety and efficacy data from Phase 3 clinical trials, international developments and conditions of emergency use approval in Hong Kong.

With regard to the use of CoronaVac for individuals aged 60 or above, the JSC-EAP considered that the benefit of using CoronaVac vaccine generally exceeds the risk of not using any vaccines in persons aged 60 or above.

The joint meeting also deliberated the impact of vaccine delivery on non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) and considered that at the current phase of the vaccination programme there is limited evidence on the effects of vaccination on preventing transmission and there are constraints in vaccine availability. Population level protection will not be achieved in the short term.

The joint meeting agreed that vaccination is only one of the tools in the overall public health response to COVID-19. The combination of NPIs with vaccination will allow for maximum protection against the virus. There is a need to continue public health strategies on NPIs, including social

distancing, good hand hygiene and wearing a mask in public, to reduce the risk of transmission.

NPIs should continue to be followed by vaccinated individuals, as well as those who have not yet been vaccinated. Any changes to NPIs should be carefully monitored. Delays in vaccine supply and suboptimal vaccine uptake would mean that NPI measures would need to be kept in place for longer.

Details of the interim recommendation are available at CHP website www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24008.html.