

Scientific Committees under CHP publish consensus recommendations on use of COVID-19 vaccine BNT162b2 among frail elderly

The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) today (February 11) published the consensus recommendations on the use of the COVID-19 vaccine by Fosun Pharma/BioNTech (BNT162b2) among frail elderly in Hong Kong.

The Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines (Advisory Panel) issued a report last month, advising the Secretary for Food and Health that under the current pandemic situation, the benefits of BNT162b2 outweigh its risk for use in Hong Kong for active immunization to prevent COVID-19 caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus, in people aged 16 or above.

Noting reports of death cases among very frail subjects following the use of BNT162b2 in some European countries, the Advisory Panel suggested more information be sought and provided to the Joint Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Disease and Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases together with the Expert Advisory Panel to the Chief Executive (JSC-EAP) for examination.

The DH had obtained information from various sources, including overseas health and drug regulatory authorities and media reports, for the review by the JSC-EAP.

Based on the available information and recommendations from overseas jurisdictions and the World Health Organization as of January 2021, the JSC-EAP considered that there is currently no evidence suggestive of any unexpected or untoward increase in mortality in frail elderly following the use of BNT162b2. There is also no clear evidence suggesting the reported deaths were due to the use of BNT162b2.

Adverse events following immunization is defined as any untoward medical occurrence which follows immunization and which does not necessarily have a causal relationship with the usage of the vaccine. For the very frail elderly, any mild adverse event from pharmaceutical products including vaccines might worsen their original disease course or condition.

For elderlies with severe frailty (e.g. bedridden elderly in residential care homes), especially those at the most extreme age groups (such as those above 85 years old), the benefits and risks of receiving BNT162b2 should be evaluated separately by attending clinicians and such clinical assessment should be exercised with greater caution. As stated in the consensus interim recommendation published in January 2021, any individual who is experiencing

acute febrile diseases should delay their vaccination and this recommendation applies to the use of BNT162b2 among frail elderly.

The JSC-EAP also considered that reports and data regarding the safety and efficacy of BNT162b2 should be closely monitored and the benefit-risk balance should be re-evaluated as more information regarding rare adverse events and long term side effects from mass vaccination programmes continue to emerge.

Details of the consensus document is available at CHP website www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24008.html.