

Scientific Committees under CHP update consensus interim recommendations on use of COVID-19 vaccines

The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (JSC) under the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health convened a meeting yesterday (February 20) to discuss and issue the updated consensus interim recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in Hong Kong.

The JSC reviewed the latest scientific evidence, and noted that all available COVID-19 vaccines (including inactivated virus and mRNA vaccines) are effective in reducing death and severe COVID-19 infection. Experts also noted results of early studies indicating that the monovalent XBB mRNA vaccines could provide enhanced protection against JN.1, which has become the predominant COVID-19 variant in Hong Kong.

Experts made the following recommendations:

1. Use of vaccines – When there is adequate supply, monovalent XBB mRNA vaccine (now provided to high-risk priority groups as a choice for initial and booster vaccination) is recommended to be extended to initial vaccination of non high-risk priority groups (e.g. healthy adults) who do not require booster vaccination, having regard to the enhanced protection offered by the vaccine. Individuals can also choose other available COVID-19 vaccines (including inactivated virus and mRNA vaccines), based on personal preference, for initial and booster vaccination given their effectiveness in reducing death and severe COVID-19 infection.
2. Priority groups and vaccination schedule for booster – The JSC considered the previous recommendation could remain applicable throughout the year. In other words, a booster dose is recommended to be given at least six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later), regardless of the number of doses received previously, for the following high-risk priority groups for enhanced protection –
 - older adults aged 50 or above including those living in residential care homes;
 - persons aged 18 to 49 years with underlying comorbidities;
 - persons with immunocompromising conditions aged six months and above;
 - pregnant women; and
 - healthcare workers.

Having regard to the above recommendation on the use of vaccines for non high-risk priority groups, the Government will continue to closely monitor the supply of monovalent XBB mRNA vaccines, and make suitable adjustment to the use of vaccines as and when appropriate.

â€œDetails of the interim recommendations are available on the CHP's website at www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24008.html.