

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

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 an online meeting, joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel (EAP) yesterday (April 6), to discuss the use of COVID-19 vaccines in Hong Kong. The updated consensus interim recommendations have been published today (April 7).

Local data showed that three doses of COVID-19 vaccines (i.e. Comirnaty vaccine or CoronaVac vaccine) are highly effective in reducing hospitalisations and death across all age groups in the adult population. As the majority of local fatal cases in the fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic have been persons aged 60 or above, the JSC-EAP thus recommended persons aged 60 years or above to receive an additional dose (i.e. fourth dose) of either Comirnaty vaccine or CoronaVac vaccine at least three months after their last dose for better protection. The same principle would also be applied to recovered persons from COVID-19 in those aged 60 or above.

The experts also re-examined the time interval between the first and second doses of Comirnaty vaccine (21 days) for immunocompromised children and adolescents, and had no objection for recovered persons to receive their next dose of COVID-19 vaccine for personal reasons (e.g. to study abroad or to fulfil a requirement for overseas travel) at a shorter interval of no less than 28 days after recovery. Separately, recovered persons without a history of vaccination in the past can be vaccinated one month after recovery.

The experts concurred that COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to persons who are unsure if they had previous COVID-19 infection as if they have not been infected. COVID-19 vaccine is safe in persons with evidence of previous SARS-CoV-2 infection, and prior COVID-19 screening before administration of COVID-19 vaccine is not required.

Meanwhile, the JSC-EAP had no objection to exercising flexibility by allowing provision of COVID-19 vaccines with seasonal influenza vaccine or other childhood immunisation vaccines on the same visit for vaccination under informed consent for administrative convenience and achieving better coverage. The same principle would also apply for similar settings including residential care homes.

The meeting also noted the development of new COVID-19 vaccines, including Omicron-specific vaccines and protein subunit vaccines, and the JSC-EAP would keep in view the development of these vaccines at this stage. For persons who are partially vaccinated outside Hong Kong with locally

unavailable COVID-19 vaccines on the "List of COVID-19 Vaccines Recognised for Specified Purposes" and under the World Health Organization's Emergency Use Listing, the JSC-EAP recommended them to complete their vaccination course with vaccines using the same platform or any suitable locally available alternative at least four weeks after the previous dose according to their needs. For those who had fully or partially been vaccinated with vaccines not on the aforesaid lists, they are recommended to start over with vaccines available in Hong Kong following the local recommended schedule.

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