

Second phase of XBB COVID-19 vaccination arrangements to start next Thursday

The Government today (January 12) announced that the second phase of vaccination arrangements of XBB mRNA COVID-19 vaccine will start on January 18, and appealed to members of the public, especially high-risk groups, to be vaccinated as soon as possible in order to enhance personal protection. The Government reiterated that, all currently available COVID-19 vaccines, including inactivated, mRNA ancestral strain or bivalent, and XBB vaccines are effective in preventing severe illness and death. To protect personal health, eligible persons may continue to choose to receive any currently available COVID-19 vaccines.

The first phase of XBB COVID-19 vaccination arrangements has been rolled out on December 14 last year, with resources focused on providing vaccination services for adult residents at residential care homes (RCHs) and the elderly aged 65 or above. The vaccination figure increased visibly after the launch of the first phase, with a total of about 45 000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines being administered as of yesterday (January 11), among which about 31 000 doses were XBB mRNA vaccine. As the vaccination figure of the above-mentioned group has stabilised, the Government will roll out the second phase of the XBB COVID-19 vaccines arrangement, which will be extended to cover other high-risk priority groups, including persons aged 50 to 64, adults aged 18 to 49 with underlying comorbidities, persons aged 6 months or above and with immunocompromising conditions, pregnant women and healthcare workers.

Starting from 9am on January 18, all high-risk priority groups (i.e. persons aged 50 or above, adults aged 18 to 49 with underlying comorbidities, persons aged 6 months or above with immunocompromising conditions, pregnant women and healthcare workers) can make a booking through the Government online booking system at booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk/forms/index.jsp. They can receive XBB COVID-19 vaccine for completing their initial or booster dose from that day at relevant vaccination venues. If necessary, eligible persons can seek assistance for making online bookings from post offices (except mobile post offices).

The Government has been striving to facilitate access to COVID-19 vaccines for high-risk priority groups, and is progressively increasing the number of vaccination venues in view of the second phase vaccination arrangement, including a general outpatient clinic (GOPC) under the Hospital Authority (HA) (Tin Shui Wai (Tin Yip Road) Community Health Centre), as well as five Private Clinic COVID-19 Vaccination Stations (PCVSs) in Yuen Long, Tsuen Wan, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong and Southern District. Also, non-member elderly people aged 65 or above can also make appointments at Wan Chai Elderly Health Centre (EHC) and Lek Yuen EHC. Together with the vaccination venues of the first phase, there are 19 PCVSs, one Children Community Vaccination Centre, 11 designated GOPCs under the HA, and two designated EHCs

of the DH. Venues providing XBB vaccination can be found at the Annex.

In addition, designated specialist outpatient clinics of the HA and designated EHCs of the DH will continue to provide XBB COVID-19 vaccines to attending patients and members respectively. The Government will also continue to provide vaccination for adult residents at RCHs for the elderly and RCHs for persons with disabilities through outreach services under the Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme.

As Hong Kong has entered the influenza season and the local COVID-19 activity has also increased significantly, the Centre for Health Protection of the DH strongly urged high-risk groups to receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) and COVID-19 booster as soon as possible to lower the risks of serious illness and death. High-risk persons can receive a COVID-19 booster at least six months after the last dose of COVID-19 vaccine or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later). For the sake of convenience, COVID-19 vaccine can be co-administered with SIV. Details of receiving both COVID-19 vaccination and SIV are available online (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106096.html).

A Government spokesman said, "The COVID-19 vaccines available in Hong Kong are all safe and effective, and fulfil quality requirements. The key to maintain the protection conferred by the vaccine is to receive suitable doses in a timely manner according to the vaccination schedule. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases under the CHP reiterated that all currently available COVID-19 vaccines are effective in preventing severe disease and death. The World Health Organization (WHO) also said that high-risk persons should receive booster doses at appropriate times to lower the risks of serious illness and death."

The Government noted the manufacture and supply of inactivated vaccine (i.e. CoronaVac/Sinovac) and reiterated that the local stock of relevant vaccine is adequate to cope with the expected use this year. The expert group of the WHO will have a meeting in March this year and it is anticipated that the meeting will discuss the recommendation on the use of COVID-19 vaccines, including variants to be covered by vaccines and the use of vaccines from different technology platforms.

â€‹Details of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme can be found at the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106934.html).