

Secretary for Health receives vaccinations against seasonal influenza and COVID-19

The Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, received vaccinations against seasonal influenza and COVID-19 at Sai Wan Ho General Out-patient Clinic today (September 24). The Under Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee; the Director of Health, Dr Ronald Lam; the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH), Dr Edwin Tsui; the Commissioner for Primary Healthcare of the Health Bureau, Dr Pang Fei-chau; the Chairman of the Hospital Authority (HA), Mr Henry Fan; the Chief Executive of the HA, Dr Tony Ko; and frontline healthcare workers also echoed the move and were vaccinated.

Professor Lo said, "Seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) is one of the most effective means to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications. I strongly appeal to all members of the public to receive SIV early as it is now the best timing to get vaccinated for effective protection in the coming year against the influenza strains predicted by the World Health Organization in preparation for the possible winter or summer influenza seasons. Separately, individuals of high-risk priority groups should also receive an additional COVID-19 booster no less than six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later) to enhance protection and reduce the risks of serious complications and death."

He continued, "To boost the SIV coverage rate among schoolchildren, special arrangements have been made under the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach Programme (SIVSOP) this year to offer a more flexible choice of vaccine options for kindergartens and childcare centres. They can choose both injectable inactivated influenza vaccines (IIV) and live attenuated influenza vaccines (LAIV) (i.e. nasal vaccines) for the same or different outreach vaccination activities. Moreover, the DH will roll out a pilot scheme in which LAIV will be provided to primary and secondary schools that had indicated earlier this year their preference for arranging LAIV for their students."

At present, around 870 kindergartens and childcare centres (80 per cent) have already arranged vaccination activities for their schoolchildren. Among them, 246 schools will offer LAIV, eight schools will offer both IIV and LAIV, and the rest will offer IIV. Separately, around 610 primary schools (93 per cent) and around 390 secondary schools (77 per cent) have arranged vaccination activities for their students. Professor Lo added, "I call on those schools that have yet to join the outreach vaccination programme to enrol as soon as possible to seize the optimum timing for vaccination and do their part to provide the best protection for schoolchildren."

Hong Kong generally experiences two influenza seasons each year. The winter influenza season usually lies between January and March or April,

whereas the summer influenza season typically runs from July to August. The overall influenza activity has remained at a low level since the end of the influenza season in late July this year. However, with reference to previous surveillance data, as the weather is expected to become cooler gradually, the CHP foresaw that the influenza activity level may rise at the end of the year. All citizens should receive SIV which can reduce the risks of serious illnesses and death.

The Government will launch the 2024/25 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programmes, including the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, the Government Vaccination Programme, the SIVSOP and the Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme the day after tomorrow (September 26) to provide free or subsidised SIV for persons aged 50 or above (including the elderly living in residential care homes); adults aged 18 to 49 with underlying comorbidities; persons aged 6 months or above with immunocompromising conditions; pregnant women and healthcare workers etc.

Furthermore, individuals of the abovementioned groups should receive an additional COVID-19 booster in a timely manner regardless of the number of doses of COVID-19 vaccines received before for dual protection. A COVID-19 vaccine can be co-administered with, or separated from, an SIV under informed consent. The inactivated COVID-19 vaccines currently used in Hong Kong (i.e. Sinovac CoronaVac) will expire on October 3, and the vaccine supplier has confirmed that they will no longer produce inactivated COVID-19 vaccines. Members of the public who would like to receive an inactivated COVID-19 vaccine should make a booking as early as possible. Starting from October 4, only mRNA vaccines will be available under the Government's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

For more details, members of the public may call the CHP at 2125 2125 or visit the [Vaccination Schemes page](#).