

## SFH reaffirms that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 and seasonal flu can build up dual protection and addresses concerns about medical manpower problem (with photos)

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, visited the COVID-19 Vaccination Stations in Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital and Tseung Kwan O Hospital and inspected the seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) service for the staff of the Hospital Authority (HA) and members of the public today (October 27). She reaffirmed that receiving COVID-19 vaccination and SIV can build up dual protection.

Professor Chan reminded members of the public on the importance of receiving COVID-19 vaccination and SIV. "Evidence repeatedly indicates that a person who contracts influenza and COVID-19 at the same time may be more seriously ill and will have a higher risk of death. Receiving SIV can reduce the chance of hospitalisation and the length of stay. As such, receiving SIV and COVID-19 vaccination is equally important," she said.

"According to the Department of Health's latest statistics, for the 213 fatal cases of COVID-19, most (93 per cent) affected elderly aged 60 or above. Among the 137 COVID-19 cases involving residents of residential care homes for the elderly, the mortality was up to 28 per cent. The proportion of fatal cases increases with age, so elderly people residing in the community or at residential care homes should get vaccinated as soon as possible to build up dual protection."

She added, "I am glad that members of the public who received COVID-19 vaccination or SIV at the two hospitals have highly praised the arrangements. I call on patients with follow-up appointments and visitors to make the best use of this arrangement to get vaccinated as soon as possible for the sake of their own health."

"The HA has set up COVID-19 Vaccination Stations at seven public hospitals to enable patients visiting hospitals for follow-up appointments and visitors, in particular patients of specialist out-patient clinics, to receive BioNTech vaccination without prior booking. Moreover, the Elderly Health Centres of the Department of Health, the HA and the District Health Centres also provide and continue to enhance COVID-19 vaccination services for elderly people with a view to providing them with one-stop vaccination services."

The HA's SIV programme this year will be carried out in two phases. In the first phase of the programme (from October 6 to November 5), the HA is providing SIV to eligible patients of public hospitals and out-patient

clinics. Eligible patients may visit public hospitals and 47 general out-patient clinics under the HA for SIV. The second phase of the programme will commence on November 8 to cover elderly people aged 65 or above living in the community. They can go to the general out-patient clinics in various districts to receive vaccination. More information is available at the website: [www.ha.org.hk/goto/gvp202122/en/](http://www.ha.org.hk/goto/gvp202122/en/).

Accompanied by the Chairman of the HA, Mr Henry Fan, and the Chief Executive of the HA, Dr Tony Ko, Professor Chan also took the opportunity to meet with front-line staff of the two hospitals to learn more about their work. She said she understood colleagues' concerns over manpower shortage, and said the Government will continue to proactively adopt a multi-pronged strategy to ease the manpower shortage of healthcare professionals in the public healthcare system.

She stressed, "Adopting a multi-pronged approach, the Government and the HA strive to ensure a sufficient supply of healthcare professionals serving in the public healthcare system. The passage of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2021 at the Legislative Council last week enables the creation of a new pathway for qualified non-locally trained doctors to practise in Hong Kong. The Government will also continue to allocate resources to train up local healthcare professionals, which include increasing training quotas and providing financial support to universities for upgrading and expanding medical teaching facilities.

"Meanwhile, the Government has rolled out and will continue to implement various initiatives to strengthen public healthcare services, including promoting public-private partnerships to relieve pressure on the public healthcare sector by making use of the capacity of the private sector; enhancing the working environment and efficiency of healthcare professionals through hardware upgrades under the two 10-Year Hospital Development Plans and development of smart hospitals; and steering primary healthcare and setting up District Health Centres or District Health Centre Expresses in 18 districts to strengthen co-ordination among various professions, sectors and organisations in the primary healthcare field to ease pressure on public hospitals."

Moreover, the HA has implemented staff retention measures including creation of the rank of Associate Nurse Consultant in the nursing grade career structure with a view to providing an alternative promotion pathway for nurses aspiring to develop a career in specialty nursing, apart from the existing clinical management stream. The new grade structure will also facilitate continuous development in the nursing profession and promote the standard of nursing service.

Finally, Professor Chan thanked the staff of the HA for their dedication to serve Hong Kong people. "I understand that the front-line healthcare staff are facing a heavy workload and huge pressure during the COVID-19 epidemic. I am most grateful for their professionalism in protecting the health of Hong Kong people," she said.

