

DH urges people to get vaccinated as soon as possible to cope with influenza season

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 20) said that the latest surveillance data showed an increase in activities of seasonal influenza and COVID-19 recently. Anticipating both seasonal influenza and COVID-19 will become more active as the weather gets colder, the CHP urges all persons aged 6 months or above (except those with known contraindications) to protect their health and that of their family members by receiving seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) as soon as possible. Furthermore, individuals in high-risk groups are encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19 concurrently to minimise the risk of serious complications and death after infection.

"The CHP has been closely monitoring local activity of respiratory pathogens in the community. Latest surveillance data on the percentage of seasonal influenza viruses detected among respiratory specimens, the influenza-associated admission rate in public hospitals, and the number of influenza-like illnesses among sentinel general out-patient clinics and private medical practitioner clinics show an increase in seasonal influenza activity from the low level over the past four weeks," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"Regarding COVID-19, the most predominant circulating strains in Hong Kong are JN.1 and its descendant lineages. While the overall activity level of COVID-19 has decreased since late July this year to a low level, there has been an increase from the low level recently," he added.

Influenza vaccination has been scientifically proven to be one of the most effective ways to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications, while significantly reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death from seasonal influenza. For schoolchildren, vaccination can reduce the chance of school absenteeism due to illness, which is beneficial to their health and learning.

"The Government has long been encouraging the public to receive vaccinations early, and providing free and subsidised SIV to eligible children, the elderly and other target groups through various Government vaccination programmes. The response has been positive. As of December 15, a total of about 1 745 000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccines have been administered under the various SIV programmes, an increase of about 5 per cent over the same period last year, with particularly strong increases of 17 per cent and 27 per cent in the number of doses received by persons aged between 50 and 64 and those aged between 12 and 18 respectively," the spokesman said.

The spokesman attributed the increase in the number of doses received by schoolchildren to the SIV School Outreach Programme. To boost the SIV coverage rate among schoolchildren, special arrangements have been made under the Outreach Programme this year:

- To offer a more flexible choice of vaccine options for kindergartens and child care centres, they can choose to provide both injectable inactivated influenza vaccines and live attenuated influenza vaccines (i.e. nasal vaccines) (LAIV) at the same or different outreach vaccination activities.
- As a pilot scheme, LAIV is also provided to selected primary and secondary schools that indicated their preference for LAIV earlier this year.

So far, about 960 kindergartens and child care centres (91 per cent), 630 primary schools (96 per cent) and 470 secondary schools (94 per cent) have completed or are arranging SIV school outreach activities, which is higher than last year's rate (about 80 per cent for kindergartens and child care centres, 95 per cent for primary schools and 70 per cent for secondary schools participated last year). The increase in secondary schools is particularly obvious. Some schools have not yet arranged outreach SIV activities, and the CHP has already appealed to the parents of these schools to arrange vaccination for their children.

"As of December 15, the SIV coverage rate for children aged 6 months to under 2 years was 16.4 per cent, which was slightly higher than that of the same period last year but still lower than that of other age groups of children. This year, service provider locations have also been optimised, with the DH's Maternal & Child Health Centres (MCHCs) open to all children aged 6 months to under 2 years, with a view to facilitating children's access to vaccinations as far as possible. Parents are advised to arrange SIV for their children as early as possible to protect the health of their children. They may book an appointment for their children to receive vaccinations at designated MCHCs via the online booking system (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk/forms/sivfhs/index.jsp)," he said.

In addition, as patients contracting both influenza and COVID-19 are more likely to develop serious complications and die, the CHP strongly urges those who have not received the initial dose of COVID-19 vaccine, especially young children over 6 months and elderly people, to receive an initial dose as soon as possible. Those high-risk groups should, in a timely manner, receive an additional booster dose six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later), regardless of the number of doses received previously.

All eligible persons can make appointments through the Government's [online booking platform](#) to receive the COVID-19 vaccine from Children Community Vaccination Centre, Private Clinic COVID-19 Community Vaccination Stations (PCVSs), designated general outpatient clinics under the Hospital Authority, or designated Student Health Service Centres, MCHCs and Elderly Health Centres of the DH.

The CHP will continue to closely monitor the situation of seasonal influenza and COVID-19 both locally and overseas. For more information on influenza and COVID-19, members of the public can visit the CHP's [seasonal influenza](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) webpages. Details of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme can also be found on the CHP's [website](#).

Inland Revenue Department alerts public to fraudulent SMS messages

The Inland Revenue Department today (December 20) alerted members of the public to fraudulent SMS messages purportedly issued by the Government, which allege that the department is implementing a tax refund policy and suggest the recipient to contact an officer through WhatsApp to claim a tax refund.

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The department has no connection with the fraudulent SMS messages, and has reported the case to the Police for further investigation. Members of the public are reminded to stay alert and not open or respond to suspicious SMS messages.

HA activates service demand surge measures

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) announced today (December 20) that the HA will activate service demand surge special measures tomorrow (December 21). In view of the cold weather and the upcoming Christmas and New Year holidays, the HA anticipates an increase in service demand at public hospitals and will closely monitor hospital operations.

The HA Chief Manager (Cluster Performance), Dr Larry Lee, said, "Public hospitals will implement special measures to cope with increasing service demand for Accident & Emergency (A&E) Departments and inpatient services, including enhanced manpower, bed capacity, and laboratory testing services for influenza and other viruses. Hospital command centres will co-ordinate discharge procedures and support arrangements for admission, discharge and transfer to ensure that patients receive timely and appropriate treatment and that beds are available for new admissions. Meanwhile, Community Geriatric Assessment Teams will strengthen support for residential care homes for the

elderly, such as increasing visits, to reduce pressure on A&E attendance and unnecessary hospitalisation."

Dr Lee noted that understanding the high demand for medical services during the Christmas and New Year holidays, the HA will enhance General Out-patient Clinic (GOPC) services. The HA urges non-emergency patients to avoid using A&E services and instead seek treatment at GOPCs, private doctors or 24-hour outpatient services at private hospitals to reduce pressure on public hospital A&Es. Members of the public can visit the Health Bureau (HKB)'s Primary Care Directory (www.pcdirectory.gov.hk). The HKB has also collated information of private hospitals, healthcare facilities, family doctors and Chinese medicine clinics that will be in operation during the 2024 Christmas and 2025 New Year holidays across the city. The information (including addresses, phone numbers and operation hours) of the relevant hospitals and clinics have been uploaded to the online portal (www.map.gov.hk/gm/s/hhbclinic/all?lg=en) for public reference in collaboration with the Spatial Data Office of the Development Bureau and the Lands Department.

The HA will implement special refund arrangements in the A&E Departments to provide stable patients with flexibility in choosing alternative medical institutions. While waiting for medical consultation at A&E, patients who wish to seek treatment at other healthcare institutions can raise a refund request for the A&E charges directly from staff on duty at the registration counter. To provide patients with greater convenience, the system has been enhanced and no longer requires form-filling. "HA Go" members may also submit refund applications through the HA mobile app "HA Go". This arrangement applies only to patients who have not been attended to by doctors, and applications must be made within 24 hours of registration. Eligible applicants will receive the refund in approximately one month by cheque by mail, credit card or electronic wallet.

The HA also appeals to members of the public to get vaccinated early for seasonal influenza and COVID-19, especially high-risk groups, to reduce the chance of infection for themselves and their family members, as well as to reduce critical cases and deaths. Members of the public may find details on the Centre for Health Protection COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106934.html) and the Vaccination Schemes website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/17980.html).

The HA expects the service demand surge special measures will last until February 9, 2025 (the 12th day of Chinese New Year), after the Chinese New Year holiday. During this period, the HA will closely monitor the situation and flexibly deploy hospital beds, resources and manpower to increase its service volume in order to meet the heightened demand while ensuring that emergency services remain unaffected.

Update on dengue fever

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 20) reported the latest number of dengue fever (DF) cases, and urged the public to maintain strict environmental hygiene, mosquito control and personal protective measures both locally and during travel.

From December 13 to yesterday (December 19), the CHP recorded three imported DF cases. The patients had travelled to Guangdong Province (one case for Zhongshan) and Indonesia (two cases) during their incubation periods.

As of yesterday, 160 cases of DF, including 155 imported and five local cases, had been recorded in 2024. In 2023, 62 imported cases of DF were recorded.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the global incidence of DF has markedly increased over the past two decades, posing a substantial public health challenge. In 2023, ongoing transmissions, combined with an unexpected spike in DF cases, had resulted in close to a historic high of over 6.5 million cases, and more than 7 300 dengue-related deaths reported in over 80 countries/territories. Since the beginning of 2024, the WHO has recorded over 13 million cases, reaching a record number of cases.

The latest surveillance data shows that there is an increase in DF cases noted in some places in Asia (such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore) compared to the same period last year.

The number of DF cases recorded in Guangdong Province has been decreasing recently. The number of DF cases there has further decreased to less than 100 cases per week (December 9 to 15) from approximately 500 cases per week in late November, according to the Guangdong Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Detailed information on the latest DF situation in Hong Kong, as well as neighbouring and overseas countries and areas, has been uploaded to the CHP website

(www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/df_imported_cases_and_overseas_figures_eng.pdf).

The continued occurrence of DF cases outside Hong Kong, coupled with the frequent travel by residents to and from Guangdong, Hong Kong and other areas, has resulted in an increased risk of importing DF cases into Hong Kong, posing a risk of local transmission.

"Apart from general measures, travellers returning from areas affected by DF should apply insect repellent for 14 days upon arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to a doctor," a spokesman for the CHP said.

The public should take heed of the following advice on mosquito control:

- Thoroughly check all gully traps, roof gutters, surface channels and drains to prevent blockage;
- Scrub and clean drains and surface channels with an alkaline detergent compound at least once a week to remove any deposited mosquito eggs;
- Properly dispose of refuse, such as soft drink cans, empty bottles and boxes, in covered litter containers;
- Completely change the water of flowers and plants at least once a week. The use of saucers should be avoided if possible;
- Level irregular ground surfaces before the rainy season;
- Avoid staying in shrubby areas; and
- Take personal protective measures such as wearing light-coloured long-sleeved clothes and trousers, and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or uncovered areas of the body when doing outdoor activities.

â€‹DEET-containing insect repellents are effective and the public should take heed of the tips below:

- Read the label instructions carefully first;
- Apply right before entering an area with risk of mosquito bites;
- Apply on exposed skin and clothing;
- Use DEET of up to 30 per cent for pregnant women and up to 10 per cent for children*;
- Apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent; and
- Reapply only when needed and follow the instructions.

* For children who travel to countries or areas where mosquito-borne diseases are endemic or epidemic and where exposure is likely, those aged 2 months or above can use DEET-containing insect repellents with a DEET concentration of up to 30 per cent.

The public should call 1823 in case of mosquito problems and may visit the following pages for more information: the DF page of the [CHP](#) and the [Travel Health Service](#), the latest [Travel Health News](#), [tips for using insect repellents](#), and the CHP [Facebook Page](#) and [YouTube Channel](#).

[Government to sell site in Sha Tin by public tender](#)

The Lands Department (LandsD) announced today (December 20) that a site, Sha Tin Town Lot No. 651 at Mei Tin Road, Tai Wai, Sha Tin, New Territories, in the 2024-25 Land Sale Programme, will be disposed of by public tender. The tender invitation for the lot will commence on December 27 and close on January 24, 2025.

Sha Tin Town Lot No. 651 has a site area of about 3 600 square metres and is designated for private residential purposes. The minimum gross floor area is 10 800 sq m, and the maximum gross floor area that may be attained is 18 000 sq m.

Land sale documents including the Form of Tender, the Tender Notice, the Conditions of Sale and the sale plan of the lot will be available for downloading from the LandsD website (www.landsd.gov.hk) from December 27, while the sale plan will be available for inspection by the public from the same day until the close of the tender. The sale plan in hard copy form may also be purchased at the Survey and Mapping Office of the LandsD, 6/F, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong, from December 27 until the close of the tender. The particulars of the tender will be gazetted on December 27.