

Transcript of remarks by SCS and SFH at media session (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, on the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme at a media session this afternoon (April 15):

Reporter: First, can authorities tell us why did it take so long for the Government to expand the vaccination to those under 30? Are you guys expanding it now in preparation for the vaccine bubble plan? Is there a possibility of further expanding the vaccination to even younger people, people under 16? If there are still unused jabs after the end of September, would these vaccination centres continue to operate? Can citizens assume that after the end of September, only Sinovac jabs will be available to them since all unused BioNTech jabs would be kind of expired already? Do officials have any estimation on how many BioNTech jabs will be unused and expired if the vaccination rate remains this low?

Secretary for the Civil Service: Thank you very much. First question is regarding the extension of the vaccination programme to cover people aged 16 to 29. We monitor closely the operation of the vaccination programme and also the demand and supply in a gradual manner. Now we have already dealt with the cancellation of more than 180 000 BioNTech bookings due to the suspension of BioNTech vaccination a few weeks ago. We have the capacity to expand the coverage of the vaccination scheme. We have also received views that quite a number of people aged below 30 would like to get the jabs so that they can protect their family members or the whole family could get vaccinated. It is the appropriate time that we introduce this arrangement.

The second question is regarding the coverage to people under 16. Firstly, we have to have available vaccine. That is the answer to your second question.

On the planning for operating the Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) until the end of September this year, our thinking behind is that we look at the supply of BioNTech vaccine. We have purchased 7.5 million doses of BioNTech vaccine and they would be delivered to Hong Kong by batches. There are certain limits. For example, you have to use the vaccines within three to four months. Why three to four months but not six months? Because the validity period of the vaccine is usually six months from the date of production. Once out of the production plant, they need to do some tests and then deliver to Hong Kong. When they arrive at Hong Kong usually we just have a period of about three to four months. And also we look at the capacity of our CVCs – we are able to handle 7.5 million doses in the next five months. So, that's roughly about the period. We have to have some sort of a plan and let the public know early, so that we can all plan accordingly.

At this stage, of course, I do not want to see any wastage of BioNTech vaccine. And that is why I announce early about our plan and urge the public to get vaccinated and make your booking as early as possible.

Reporter: (Inaudible.)

Secretary for the Civil Service: I tell the public about our plan of operating the CVCs by end of September. We will closely monitor the situation and we hope that we could all work together to make good use of the capacity of our CVCs from now on until end of September, so that every day all the capacity of the CVCs could be used because every day the BioNTech CVCs could handle up to 40 000 doses. You can see that every day we have not used up all the capacity. It is wastage already, but not wastage of vaccine because we handle it very carefully. We urge that we need to work together to make good use of the capacity of the CVCs and let's work together towards the target. We use up all the available vaccines provided to us so that all the 7.5 million doses could be used for more than 3 million Hong Kong people.

Secretary for Food and Health: I just want to quickly respond to your question about vaccine for people under 16. We are closely monitoring the development and research of vaccines. We understand that there are some vaccines that have now got some data about their use in people under 16. The Department of Health has been working very closely and trying to get more data from these vaccine manufacturers. If the data is satisfactory, we would obviously provide it to our expert committee for scrutiny. We will continue to closely monitor the development of vaccines for people under 16.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)