

Update on monitoring COVID-19 vaccination

In the preceding week till 11.59pm on February 20, the Department of Health (DH) received 56 reports (Note 1) of adverse events following COVID-19 immunisation. No death case was reported by the Hospital Authority (HA) involving individuals who had received vaccines within 14 days before they passed away and had potential association with vaccination.

As at 8pm on February 20, around 12.45 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered for members of the public. Around 5.88 million people had received at least one dose of vaccine, including 85.9 per cent of the population aged 12 or above. The DH received 7 042 reports (Note 1) of adverse events (0.06 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered). Among the death cases concerning persons who had been vaccinated, including 67 cases (Note 2) with vaccination within 14 days before they passed away (0.0005 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered), none of the death cases was associated with vaccination.

As at February 20, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation had concluded that 48 death cases had no causal relationship with vaccination, and preliminarily considered that 14 cases were not associated with vaccination. Five cases are still pending further information for assessment. The Expert Committee considered that there is no unusual pattern identified so far, and will continue to closely monitor the relevant situation and collect data for assessment.

According to information from the HA, during the period from January 24 to February 20, the ratio of death cases out of those without a vaccination record was 242.6 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases for those with a vaccination record was 12.6 cases for every 100 000 people. The overall death rate is similar to that recorded in the past three years. Out of those without a vaccination record, the ratio of death cases with acute stroke or acute myocardial infarction was 12.0 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases under the same category for those with a vaccination record was 1.1 cases for every 100 000 people. Furthermore, the ratio of miscarriage cases out of those without a vaccination record was 39.8 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of miscarriage cases for those who had a vaccination record was 9.1 cases for every 100 000 people. Based on the statistical analysis of the above figures, there is no evidence that vaccination increases the risk of death or miscarriage for recipients. The relevant reference statistics will be uploaded to the thematic website for the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

The majority of non-death cases of adverse events received so far are relatively minor cases. The relevant details can be found in the "Report on the Safety Monitoring of COVID-19 Vaccines in Hong Kong" (www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/do/en/doc/Safety_Monitoring_of_COVID-19_Vaccines_in_Hong_Kong.pdf).

"The current epidemic situation is of grave concern, and death and severe cases involving children and elderly persons have been recorded. Children and elderly persons are our focus of protection in vaccination. For elderly persons, the COVID-19 vaccination rate for the elderly aged 80 or above in Hong Kong is only around 44 per cent at present, meaning that 56 per cent of the elderly in that age group are in a dangerous situation, which is alarming. The Comirnaty and CoronaVac vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from COVID-19. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. The Government has expanded the third dose vaccination programme to include all people who have received two doses of vaccines for a period of time. The Vaccine Pass arrangement will also be implemented in full at all catering business and scheduled premises starting from tomorrow (February 24). We call on members of the public who are not yet vaccinated, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a much higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, to get vaccinated as early as possible for better self-protection. Members of the public who are currently eligible for a third dose should also get the dose as soon as possible. The minimum age for receiving the CoronaVac vaccine has been lowered to three years old, while the minimum age for receiving the Comirnaty vaccine is five years old. We call on parents to arrange vaccination for their children as early as possible for better protection," a Government spokesman said.

Note 1: Provisional figures. In the preceding week till 11.59pm on February 20, the DH received one report of suspected myocarditis or pericarditis involving an adolescent in the age group of three to 15. The case involved a male aged 15. He experienced chest pains within two days after receiving the Comirnaty vaccine. His condition is stable.

Note 2: In the preceding week till 11.59pm on February 20, the DH received three death reports involving individuals who had received COVID-19 vaccination within 14 days before passing away. The cases involved a female aged 86, and two males aged 91 and 72 respectively. There is no clinical evidence that the incidents arose from vaccination.