

Update on monitoring COVID-19 vaccination

In the preceding week till 11.59pm on March 20, the Department of Health (DH) received 39 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 March 20, around 14.53 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered for members of the public. Around 6.46 million people had received at least one dose of vaccine, including 91.5 per cent of the population aged 12 or above. The DH received 7 212 reports (Note 1) of adverse events (0.05 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered). Among the death cases concerning persons who had been vaccinated, including 86 cases (Note 2) with vaccination within 14 days before they passed away (0.0006 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered), none of the death cases was associated with vaccination.

As at March 20, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation had concluded that 53 death cases had no causal relationship with vaccination, and preliminarily considered that 13 cases were not associated with vaccination. Twenty 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 February 21 to March 20, the ratio of death cases out of those without a vaccination record was 818.1 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases for those with a vaccination record was 48.3 cases for every 100 000 people. Out of those without a vaccination record, the ratio of death cases with acute stroke or acute myocardial infarction was 18.9 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases under the same category for those with a vaccination record was 1.5 cases for every 100 000 people. Furthermore, the ratio of miscarriage cases out of those without a vaccination record was 45 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of miscarriage cases for those who had a vaccination record was 8.5 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 56 per cent at present, meaning that 44 per cent of the elderly in that age group are in a dangerous situation, which is alarming. Among the over 6 000 death cases from COVID-19 infection cumulatively recorded in the fifth wave, nearly 90 per cent are elderly persons aged 70 or above, out of which nearly 90 per cent did not receive or only received one dose of vaccine. 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. 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 March 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 female aged 13. She experienced chest pains within one day after receiving the Comirnaty vaccine. Her condition is stable.

Note 2: In the preceding week till 11.59pm on March 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 82 and two males aged 55 and 85 respectively. There is no clinical evidence that the incidents arose from vaccination.