

USFH calls on people to take precautions to prevent flu (with photos)

The Under Secretary for Food and Health, Dr Chui Tak-yi, said today (January 8) that the latest surveillance data showed that there has been a continued increase in local influenza activity, signaling that Hong Kong will enter the winter flu season shortly. People should heighten their vigilance to adopt strict personal and environmental hygiene as well as have a proper understanding of the importance and efficacy of flu vaccines.

As the flu season usually lasts for months, Dr Chui appealed to those who have yet to receive flu jabs to do so immediately, as influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons.

"The winter flu season has already started in quite a number of tourist hotspots. Those who have plans to travel during the Lunar New Year holidays should practice strict personal hygiene and get vaccinated now. Upon return to Hong Kong, please consult a doctor promptly if experiencing a fever or other symptoms. Inform the doctor of your recent travel history and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spreading the disease," he said.

Dr Chui visited the Annunciation Catholic Kindergarten today to view the free delivery of influenza vaccines to children on campus through a school outreach programme, and listen to the views of the school management and some parents on the programme.

"In the past, some small-scale kindergartens, child care centres and even primary schools might think it was hard to identify private doctors to arrange flu vaccinations on campus," said Dr Chui. "Now, with the assistance of the Government, schools can arrange free outreach vaccination services conveniently by participating in the outreach programmes, with a view to effectively protecting the pupils against influenza.

"Based on epidemiological and clinical experiences, vaccinating school children can effectively prevent influenza and reduce influenza-related complications. Furthermore, it is of prime importance that children with a fever, regardless of the presence of respiratory symptoms, should not be allowed to attend school. They should seek medical advice and avoid school till 48 hours after the fever has subsided."

In case children are not able to receive vaccinations on campus, parents can take their children to private doctors enrolled in the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) to be vaccinated. The Government will provide a subsidy of \$210 per dose of influenza vaccine for eligible children.

Meanwhile, Dr Chui reminded people who were generally at increased risk

of severe influenza or transmitting influenza to those at high risk, to receive a vaccination as soon as possible. They include persons aged 50 years or above, pregnant women, elderly persons living in residential care homes, long-stay residents of institutions for persons with disabilities and persons with chronic medical problems.

As at January 5, about 206 000 and 79 000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccines had been administered via the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) conducted in some 430 primary schools and 700 kindergartens/child care centres respectively. The total number of doses administered by different programmes including the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP) and the VSS was about 1 190 000, representing an increase of about 17 per cent over the same period in the 2018/19 season.

People may call the Centre for Health Protection under the Department of Health at 2125 2125 for enquiries or visit the dedicated webpage (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/17980.html) for details of the VSS and the GVP.

