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21 June 2011

Dear Doctor,

**The Scientific Committee Recommendation on  
Seasonal Influenza Vaccination for the 2011/12 Season**

I am pleased to inform you that the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) has updated the recommendations for seasonal influenza vaccination in the coming 2011/12 influenza season. The priority target groups for seasonal influenza vaccination for 2011/12 season are as follows:

- (A) Elderly persons living in residential care homes
- (B) Long-stay residents of institutions for the disabled
- (C) Persons aged 50 years or above
- (D) Persons with chronic medical problems\*
- (E) Health care workers
- (F) Children aged 6 months to 5 years
- (G) Pregnant women
- (H) Poultry workers
- (I) Pig farmers and pig-slaughtering industry personnel

Apart from the target groups recommended in the 2010/11 season, people aged 50-64 and obese individuals with body mass index (BMI)  $\geq 30$  are recommended as priority target groups for influenza vaccination in the 2011/12 season, since they are at a higher risk for influenza associated intensive care unit (ICU) admission, complications and deaths.



In the last winter influenza season, a significant proportion of ICU or fatal influenza cases (41%) were persons aged 50-64 years, exceeding that of elders aged 65 years or above (17%). Also, most (41%) influenza-related deaths affected persons aged 50-64 years. In contrast, during previous influenza seasons (except summer 2009), about 85% of fatal cases occurred in the elderly. Besides, the incidence of ICU or fatal influenza cases in healthy individuals aged 50-64 years was 1.8 per 100,000 population which was higher than the corresponding incidences in any other age group, including young children aged below 6 years (0.7 per 100,000) and elders (0.6 per 100,000). Similar to previous influenza seasons, persons with pre-existing chronic disease patients had also higher rates of ICU or fatal outcome than healthy people across all ages.

In addition, current evidence suggested that obesity is an independent risk factor for severe Influenza A(H1N1) 2009 virus (pH1N1 virus) infection. Local data also supports that obese individuals with BMI  $\geq 30$  have increased risk for influenza associated complications and deaths. The findings were consistent with studies from France, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States which showed that obesity, after adjustment of underlying chronic illnesses, was associated with severe pH1N1 infection and death.

Given influenza vaccines offer approximately 70-90% protection against clinical influenza in healthy adults and severe cases do occur in previously healthy persons, the SCVPD recommends that seasonal influenza vaccination is suitable for personal protection against clinical influenza for all persons except those with known contraindications. Members of the public can consult their family doctors to receive the vaccination for personal protection.

The SCVPD recommends all health care workers to receive seasonal influenza vaccination in order to reduce influenza morbidity. It could also reduce the risk of transmitting influenza to patients who are at high risk of complications and mortality from influenza. Therefore, you and your health care staff are highly encouraged to receive seasonal influenza vaccination in the coming season.

To ensure adequate supply of influenza vaccines, you may wish to consider vaccine procurement early. Concerted efforts from both private and public sectors are needed for successful implementation of the SCVPD's recommendations and your continuous support is highly appreciated.

Finally, the following health advice for influenza is pertinent besides vaccination:

- To build up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking;
- To maintain good personal hygiene, and wash hands after sneezing, coughing or cleaning nose; and
- To wear a mask if having symptoms of respiratory infection.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CW', written in a cursive style.

(Dr Christine WONG)  
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection  
Department of Health