Information Note on Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme

Benefits of Getting Seasonal Influenza Vaccination
Respiratory infection caused by seasonal influenza is common. It can be a serious illness with complications to the weak and frail and elderly persons and may even lead to death in the most serious cases. During influenza pandemics, secondary bacterial pneumonia is an important cause of morbidity and mortality. Vaccination is one of the effective means to prevent seasonal influenza, pneumococcal infection and its complications. It can also lower the risk of hospitalisation and mortality among elderly people.

Seasonal Influenza and Vaccination
Influenza is an infectious viral disease. It can be caused by various types of influenza viruses. In Hong Kong, the two subtypes of influenza A virus, H1N1 and H3N2, and influenza B virus, are most commonly seen. Influenza occurs in Hong Kong throughout the year, but is usually more common in periods from January to March and from July to August. The virus mainly spreads by respiratory droplets. The disease is characterised by fever, sore throat, cough, headache, muscle aches, runny nose and general tiredness. It is usually self-limiting with recovery in two to seven days. However, it can be a serious illness to the weak and frail and elderly persons, and may be complicated by bronchitis, pneumonia or even death in the most serious cases. Serious influenza infection can occur even in healthy individuals.

- **Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Composition**
  The vaccine provided under Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme (RVP) 2016/17 contains the following:
  - an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
  - an A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 (H3N2)-like virus
  - a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus
  - a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus

  Inactivated seasonal influenza vaccine is used under RVP 2016/17

- **Recommended Dose**
  Persons aged 9 or above should receive one dose of seasonal influenza vaccine every year. To ensure adequate immunity against seasonal influenza, children under 9 years old who have never received any seasonal influenza vaccine are recommended to be given 2 doses of seasonal influenza vaccine with a minimum interval of 4 weeks. Children below 9 years, who have received seasonal influenza vaccine in the 2015/16 season or before are recommended to receive one dose in the 2016/17 season.
Who should not receive inactivated seasonal influenza vaccination

People who are allergic to a previous dose of inactivated influenza vaccine or other vaccine components. **For example, Fluarix™ Tetra contains Gentamicin** are not suitable to have inactivated seasonal influenza vaccination. For vaccine components, please refer to drug insert. Individuals with mild egg allergy who are considering an influenza vaccination can be given inactivated influenza vaccine in primary care. Individuals with diagnosed or suspected severe egg allergy should be seen by an allergist/immunologist for evaluation of egg allergy and for administration of inactivated influenza vaccine if clinically indicated. Those with bleeding disorders or on anticoagulants should consult their doctors for advice. If an individual suffers from fever on the day of vaccination, the vaccination should be deferred till recovery.

- **Why should pregnant women receive seasonal influenza vaccination**

Influenza vaccination in pregnant women has shown benefits for both mother and child in terms of reduced acute respiratory infections. The World Health Organization considers inactivated seasonal influenza vaccine is safe in pregnancy and there is no evidence showing such vaccine can cause abnormality in foetus even if given during the first trimester. However, pregnant women should not receive live attenuated influenza vaccine because it contains a live virus. Pregnant women should consult obstetrics and gynaecology doctors for any queries. Inactivated seasonal influenza vaccine is used under RVP 2016/17.

- **What are the possible side effects of the inactivated seasonal influenza vaccine**

Inactivated seasonal influenza vaccine is very safe and usually well tolerated apart from occasional soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. Some recipients may experience fever, muscle and joint pains, and tiredness beginning 6 to 12 hours after vaccination and lasting up to two days. If fever or discomforts persist, please consult a doctor. Immediate severe allergic reactions like hives, swelling of the lips or tongue, and difficulties in breathing are rare and require emergency consultation.

Influenza vaccination may be rarely followed by serious adverse events such as Guillain-Barré syndrome (about 1 case per million vaccinees), meningitis or encephalopathy (1 in 3 million doses distributed) and severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) (9 in 10 million doses distributed). However, influenza vaccination may not necessarily have causal relations with these adverse events. Studies have shown that the risk of Guillain-Barré Syndrome after influenza vaccination (17.20 per million) is much higher than after influenza vaccination (1.03 per million).