

**Progress Report on the Motion on
“Strengthening the Prevention of Communicable Diseases for
Children and the Elderly”**

moved by Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo,

as amended by Hon LI Kwok-ying,

at the Legislative Council Meeting of 7 May 2008

Purpose

This Report sets out the actions taken by the Government to follow up the captioned Motion. The Motion passed by the Legislative Council is enclosed at Annex.

Expansion of the Coverage of Immunisation against Communicable Diseases

To recommend new target groups for receiving influenza vaccination in 2008-09

2. Each year, the Scientific Committee for Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) recommends the target groups for influenza vaccination in the light of the review of local and overseas scientific evidence regarding influenza vaccination, the World Health Organization’s recommendations and assessment of the latest influenza situation. The SCVPD has already finalized its recommendations on

influenza vaccination for 2008-09, and the recommendations have also been uploaded onto the CHP's website.

3. This year, in addition to the target groups already covered in 2007-08, the SCVPD has recommended the inclusion of “children aged 2 to 5 years” on top of the existing group of “children aged 6 to 23 months” so as to reduce their hospital admissions. Meanwhile, the SCVPD has also proposed that “persons with chronic neurological condition, whose respiratory function is compromised or who lack the ability to care for themselves” be included in the group of “patients with chronic illness”. In other words, the SCVPD has recommended that this group of patients to receive influenza vaccination. The Administration is studying the recommendations of the SCVPD seriously and will carefully consider how best the target groups recommended by the SCVPD should be vaccinated.

4. While the provision of influenza vaccination at government clinics is one of the options, we are also considering other alternatives, for example, the provision of a fixed subsidy to encourage children aged 6 months to 5 years to receive influenza vaccination at private clinics. This can help promote the participation of private doctors in the provision of preventive healthcare and it is also in line with the Government's policy direction of establishing a family doctor system and fostering public-private partnership in the provision of healthcare services. We, together with the DH, are holding discussions with private doctors and the departments concerned to look into the details of this subsidy scheme.

To review the Childhood Immunisation Programme

5. The CHP has commissioned a local university to conduct a study to review the cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit of incorporating four child vaccines into the Childhood Immunisation Programme (CIP). The findings of the study have already been submitted by the university concerned to the Secretariat of the Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases (RFCID) for review, while the initial findings have also been discussed earlier at a meeting of the SCVPD.

6. The study will only be finalised after going through the review process by RFCID. After the review and endorsement of the study, the Government will consider its findings and the recommendations of the SCVPD before making a decision on whether it is necessary to incorporate new vaccines, including pneumococcal vaccines, in our CIP.

Enhancing Communicable Disease Surveillance, Prevention and Control in the Community

7. Sentinel surveillance refers to the regular collection of data from a network of sentinel points. This component monitors trends of influenza-like illness, acute gastroenteritis, hand-foot-mouth disease and acute conjunctivitis in the community. At present, the CHP maintains sentinel surveillance points at private doctors, General Outpatient Clinics, Chinese medicine practitioners, childcare centres and residential care

homes for the elderly. Participants are required to collect relevant data on a regular basis and send them to the CHP for analysis.

8. The CHP has developed an electronic platform for childcare centres participating in the sentinel surveillance system. The system has been operating effectively. The CHP is planning to extend it to other sentinel surveillance sites.

9. Besides, the Administration has established outbreak reporting mechanisms in the community to ensure timely investigation of outbreak incidents. Upon receipt of notification of outbreaks by schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, elderly homes, etc., CHP will swiftly conduct investigations and give health advice to those concerned in order to curb the spread of communicable diseases.

10. The Visiting Health Teams under the Elderly Health Service (EHS) of the DH visit elderly homes and assess their infection control measures on a regular basis. Elderly home staff are provided with in-service training and guidance on infection control as well as knowledge of infectious diseases and skills in infection control. In addition, the EHS and the CHP organise refresher courses for Infection Control Officers of elderly homes every year to enhance their skills and knowledge of infection control.

Strengthening Health Education and Risk Communication to Improve Personal and Environmental Hygiene

11. The CHP will continue to use a variety of channels to communicate health risks and deliver health messages to the general community, with a view to raising public awareness of personal and environmental hygiene. Examples include sending letters to operators of community institutions, such as schools and elderly homes, and medical professionals; publishing a bi-weekly bulletin (Communicable Disease Watch) on its website; publishing weekly reports of sentinel surveillance findings on its website; and conducting media briefings, issuing press releases and producing Announcement of Public Interests (API). The Food and Environmental Health Department will continue to run territory-wide anti-rodent and anti-mosquito campaigns this year to ensure environmental hygiene.

Food and Health Bureau

June 2008

(Translation)

**Motion on
“Strengthening the prevention of communicable diseases
for children and the elderly”
moved by Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
at the Legislative Council meeting
of Wednesday, 7 May 2008**

Motion as amended by Hon LI Kwok-ying

“That, in the face of continuous threat of influenza and also a possibility that a number of communicable diseases may break out in Hong Kong, and given that children and the elderly are high-risk groups whose health may be more seriously affected by these communicable diseases, this Council urges the Government to strengthen the prevention and control of communicable diseases; expand the coverage of immunisation against such diseases, including providing free influenza vaccination for all elderly people and children, as well as reviewing the Childhood Immunisation Programme and studying the introduction of new vaccines in the light of the development of communicable diseases and vaccines; review the existing infection control measures in kindergartens, schools, residential care homes for the elderly, medical institutions and public facilities with high pedestrian flow and allocate more resources for these institutions to improve the prevention and control of communicable diseases; improve environmental hygiene, including strengthening anti-rodent and anti-mosquito efforts; and step up education to enhance the awareness of personal hygiene, so as to reduce the risk of the public being infected with communicable diseases.”