



香港兒科護理學院
Hong Kong College of
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香港兒童免疫過敏及
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The Hong Kong Society
for Paediatric
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香港兒科護士學會
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“Appealing to Parents and Carers: Infants 6 months and above, Children and Adolescents Should Complete COVID-19 Vaccination Schedule As Soon As Possible to Prevent Acute Complications, Severe Disease, Fatality, Medium and Long-term Sequelae of COVID-19 Infection – Joint Statement by The Hong Kong Paediatric Society, The Hong Kong Society for Paediatric Immunology Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the Hong Kong College of Paediatric Nursing and the Hong Kong Paediatric Nurses Association”

Since the outbreak of the SARS-Cov2 Omicron variant in South Africa in November 2021, it has quickly swept the whole world. The Omicron wave hit Hong Kong in February and March this year, and the elderly and young children were most severely affected. Both Hong Kong and overseas research data have found that children infected with Omicron variant are at risk of developing acute complications of the upper respiratory tract and central nervous system such as "Croup" and "Acute Necrotizing Encephalitis". Recently, we have witnessed young children infected with COVID with rapid deteriorating condition, and even died within a very short time after infection. The only way to safely acquire individual immunity against COVID-19, and to build herd immunity, is through effective Covid-19 vaccination. There is sufficient scientific evidence around the world to confirm that COVID-19 vaccination can effectively prevent severe COVID-19 infection, reduce the risk of hospitalization and death, and risk of complications after recovery. Most of the children who died of the Omicron variant infections during the fifth wave in Hong Kong have not completed the COVID-19 vaccination schedule. Children who had completed COVID-19 vaccinations have a much lower risk of severe disease and hospitalization. Parents and carers are strongly advised to bring their children to complete COVID-19 vaccination schedule as soon as possible.

At the same time, parents and carers should not underestimate the medium- and long-term sequelae of children infected with COVID-19. Paediatric experts have observed that some children and adolescents will develop serious complications like "Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)" after recovering from COVID-19 infection. Vast majority of MIS-C occurred in children who have not been vaccinated or have been vaccinated for less than 14 days. Even if they initially had mild symptoms at time of COVID-19 infection, when they recovered about 2 to 8 weeks later, they presented with persistent fever, conjunctivitis, “strawberry tongue” and inflammation of different body organs including the heart, brain, liver, kidneys and the skin. Most children with MIS-C required intensive care, the use of ventilators, cardiac drugs and high-dose steroids and cases of death have been reported. Some children will have long-term organ damage and sequelae after recovery from MIS-C requiring close follow up.

Data from a local clinical observation of the cohort group who have been followed up after the acute disease shows that about 19% of children infected with COVID-19 developed “Long COVID”. According to the World Health Organization, “Long COVID” refers to the symptoms that appear within three months of COVID-19 infection, these symptoms persist for at least two months, and cannot be explained by other diseases. There are a spectrum of symptoms with different severity involving multiple organs and can affect the patient's daily life to a considerable extent. The most commonly observed symptoms in local children are insomnia, headache, persistent fatigue, poor memory and cognitive deterioration affecting learning.

We would like to emphasize that the most effective way to prevent the occurrence of "Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children" and "Long COVID" is to allow the children to receive the recommended number of doses of COVID-19 vaccination. The U.S. Centres for Disease Control has tracked thousands of patients with MIS-C and found that COVID-19 vaccination could reduce the incidence of MIS-C significantly. A French study showed that COVID-19 vaccination could reduce the severity of symptoms and the impact on daily life of patients with “Long COVID”.

To avoid severe illness and sequelae of COVID-19 in children, parents should bring their children for COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible. The two COVID-19 vaccines currently being used in Hong Kong are safe and effective as supported by clinical data. Expert recommendations of the Joint Scientific Committee and the Expert Advisory Panel are as follows:

- a) Children from 6 months to 4 years old can be vaccinated with the Sinovac vaccine,
- b) Children and adolescents between 5 and 17 years old can be vaccinated with the BioNtech vaccine or Sinovac vaccine.

The first and second doses of Sinovac vaccine are separated by one month, and the second and third doses are separated by at least three months. The first and second doses of BioNTech vaccine are separated by two months, and the second and third doses are at least five months apart. The Hong Kong Department of Health and the Hong Kong Hospital Authority have a comprehensive medical information system to closely monitor the possible adverse reactions after vaccination. Parents can be reassured that the two COVID-19 vaccines used in children and adolescents are immunogenic, safe and effective as supported by the data collected by the ongoing monitoring system.

Many parents are worried about that their children will develop allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine. In fact, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is very similar to receiving the flu shot. The vast experiences around the world have found that allergy is not a contradiction to receive COVID-19 vaccination. Children with allergies like asthma, allergic rhinitis, eczema, food or even drug allergies can safely receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and no serious allergic reactions have been reported.

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society, The Hong Kong Society for Paediatric Immunology Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the Hong Kong College of Paediatric Nursing and the Hong Kong Paediatric Nurses Association would like to issue a joint statement here, appealing to parents and carers for COVID-19 Vaccination in infants 6 months and above, children and adolescents to prevent acute complications, hospital admissions, severe disease, fatality, medium and long-term sequelae resulting from COVID-19 infection.

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