

## COVID-19: Riskier areas to receive more vaccines

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Medical staff administer a shot of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to a person at a care home in Chiayi County yesterday.

**Photo: Wang Shan-yen, Taipei Times**

The Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) yesterday said that cities and counties with a higher risk of COVID-19 infection would receive 5 or 10 percent more vaccine doses in the next distribution round.

On Friday, 663,100 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, about half of the 1.24 million doses donated by Japan, were distributed to local governments.

However, as the vast majority of cases confirmed since last month were reported in Taipei and New Taipei City, Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) and New Taipei City Mayor Hou You-yi (侯友宜) on Saturday asked why Kaohsiung seemingly received more doses than their two municipalities.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Deputy Director-General Chuang Jen-hsiang (莊建人), who is the CECC's spokesperson, on Saturday evening said that about 10,100 of the 91,000 doses distributed to Kaohsiung were for the military, so New Taipei City received the most doses at 83,000.

Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中), who heads the center, yesterday said that the number of doses distributed was calculated based on the same principle for each area.

The doses covered 60 percent of people in the top three priority groups who have not been vaccinated, 60 percent (80 percent for outlying islands) of residential long-term care center workers and residents, 27 percent (90 percent for outlying islands) of senior residents who are 75 and older, and all people on dialysis, he said.

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As public health specialists have suggested that infection risk stratification should also be taken into consideration, the center would provide 10 percent more doses to high-risk areas — Taipei and New Taipei City — in the next distribution round, which is expected to be on Tuesday or Wednesday, Chen said.

The center would also provide 5 percent more doses to medium-high risk areas, including Keelung, Taoyuan, Taichung, and Changhua and Miaoli counties, he said.

An additional 2,000 doses would be distributed to Lienchiang County in the next round, as medical resources on outlying islands are scarce and transportation is problematic, he added.

So as not to increase their risk of virus transmission, people aged 75 and older are recommended to get vaccinated at their nearest location, even if they are not living at their household registration location, Chen said.

The next distribution round would take into consideration the vaccination efficiency of cities and counties, he said, adding that vaccines would immediately be distributed to cities and counties that have almost finished administering the vaccines they have.

However, he said that local governments should not race to vaccinate people, as they would still receive vaccine doses based on the allocation principle. Meanwhile, Chuang addressed public concerns about the vaccine candidates of local manufacturers, which might be approved for use in Taiwan later this year.

Some politicians last week asked why the price of the vaccine candidates by local vaccine makers seemed to be much higher than major vaccines from other countries.

Chuang yesterday said that different vaccines are made using different technologies, and the domestically produced ones are protein subunit vaccines.

To test the efficacy of domestically produced vaccine candidates, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) would examine whether vaccine candidate recipients produced neutralizing antibodies inferior to those of AstraZeneca vaccine recipients, he said.

The FDA and experts would strictly review the data submitted by local vaccine makers to assess the safety and efficacy of their vaccines, he said, adding that it would only issue emergency use authorization if the benefits of administering the vaccine outweigh the risks from COVID-19 infection.

The FDA has held several specialist meetings and referenced regulations in other countries to establish a standard for emergency use authorization, he added.

Local vaccine makers are also planning to conduct phase 3 trials in other countries, hoping to obtain international verification, Chuang said.

In related developments, Ministry of National Defense spokesman Major General Shih Shun-wen (石俊文) said that the military yesterday began administering the vaccine to military personnel based on a priority list, without providing any further information.

According to local media reports, the military has prioritized frontline personnel, such as the members of chemical units responsible for disinfection, medical personnel and pilots.

So far, 11 of the approximately 180,000 people in the armed forces have contracted COVID-19, the ministry said.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the ministry has postponed reservist call-ups and the live-fire component of this year's Han Kuang exercises until September.

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Additional reporting by CNA

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