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Flu and pneumococcal vaccination drive targets seniors in Geylang Bahru



Madam Heng Siew Tiang was among the residents who took the flu and pneumococcal vaccines in Geylang Bahru. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



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SINGAPORE - Charitable healthcare organisation Sata CommHealth is scaling up its influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations for senior citizens as the Covid-19 outbreak eases.

The first day of a vaccination drive at a Housing Board void deck in Geylang Bahru on Monday (May 9) reached out to about 75 seniors.

By Tuesday, a total of 150 seniors will have received their shots.

MP for Jalan Besar GRC Wan Rizal, who spoke with residents and volunteers at the vaccination drive, said seniors are less afraid of getting injections now.

"Covid-19 has shown us how important vaccinations are. The elderly are now more open to getting vaccines, which is a positive sign," he said.

"As we move beyond Covid-19, we must remember that pneumonia is a disease that affects the elderly. My grandmother passed away from pneumonia; it's not something to take lightly."

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, about 4,000 patients a year died from influenza, viral pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.

Pneumococcal pneumonia is a lung infection caused by a bacterium called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. It can also affect other parts of the body such as the ears, sinuses, brain and spinal cord, and blood.

All seniors aged 65 and above are recommended to get vaccinated once a year against flu, and take two pneumococcal vaccines one year apart.

Fewer seniors took their flu and pneumococcal vaccines last year as the focus was on Covid-19 vaccination, Sata CommHealth chief executive Kelvin Phua said.

Last year, 877 seniors took their flu vaccines, down from 5,142 in 2020, according to Sata's data.

For pneumococcal vaccines, 243 seniors took either of the two jabs last year, compared with 383 in 2020.

But the numbers have already gone up this year, with 1,086 seniors having taken the flu vaccine and 471 having had the pneumococcal vaccine as at May 6.



By May 10, a total of 150 seniors will have received their shots. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN PHOTO: ST

At the drive on Monday, volunteers took the seniors' blood pressure and checked their medical history to make sure they are eligible for the jabs.

The shots are free for seniors during this drive. At Sata CommHealth clinics, flu jabs normally cost \$30 to \$40, and pneumococcal jabs \$120 to \$150. The jabs are highly subsidised for seniors aged 65 and above with a Pioneer Generation or Merdeka Generation card.

Madam Heng Siew Tiang, 72, who was among the residents who took the flu and pneumococcal vaccines, said the process went smoothly.

"My last flu jab was in 2016. I'm thankful that volunteers informed me to take the jabs this time," she added.

Madam Heng, who is fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and has taken her booster shot, said she hopes other seniors will not be afraid of getting vaccinated.

"After getting the jab, I feel protected. It's convenient to get it at the void deck. If we're told to go to the clinic, sometimes we wouldn't know where to go," she added.

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Mr Letchumanapathy Jeevaretnam, 86, said taking the vaccines is a natural step to keep his health in check.

"I like to walk every day for my health. I'm glad Kolam Ayer Community Club told me about this vaccine, it doesn't hurt and it's convenient to take it," he added.



Mr Letchumanapathy s/o Jeevaretnam said taking the vaccines is a natural step to keep his health in check. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN
PHOTO: ST

Some seniors also got to try out Sata CommHealth's new electric vehicle for health screenings and to take their vaccines.

Launched in March, the bus can accommodate a maximum of two patients and provide services such as retinal photography, blood pressure screening and diabetic foot screening. It will be in Geylang Bahru on Monday and Tuesday.

Sata CommHealth, which is in its 75th year, conducts public education programmes that reach out to more than 20,000 seniors every year.

The programmes educate them on the importance of flu and pneumococcal vaccinations to prevent hospitalisation and death from preventable diseases.

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