The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about health and healing

防 = 防衛 (fang wei = defend-guard), 防線 (fang xian = defense-lines). 防空洞 (fang kong dong = protect-air-raid-holes/caves) = air-raid shelters. 防毒面罩 (fang du mian zao = prevent-toxic-gas-face-cover) = gas masks. Terrorist attacks are 防不勝防 (fang bu sheng fang = protect-not-succeed-protect = never completely detectable/avoidable).

In summer, housewives spray 防蟲劑 (fang cong ji = prevent- bugs-medicine = insect detergents), swimmers rub 防曬油 (fang shai you = protect-from-sunlight-oil = sunburn lotion), 護士 (hu shi = protect-scholar = nurses) 打防疫針 (da fang yi zhen = hit-prevent-epidemic-needle = perform anti-infections injections).

“上醫治未病” (shang yi zhi wei bing = top/best-doctors-heal-not-yet-ill) means the best doctors treat you before you become ill.

Pronunciation: fang (Putonghua, 2nd tone), fong (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: defend, guard, protect, prevent

by Diana Yue