

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (32) in DH CDB/8/27/1 Pt. 24

2 May 2024

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

Vigilance against increased Seasonal Influenza Activity in Hong Kong

Following our previous letter dated 11 January 2024, we would like to update you on the latest activity of seasonal influenza. Hong Kong has entered the winter influenza season since early January this year. The local seasonal influenza activity persists at a high level with recent increase, and we anticipate that the current influenza season would persist for a period of time. The community should heighten vigilance and take proper personal protection measures against influenza and other respiratory infections.

The surveillance data of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) showed that both weekly percentage of detections tested positive for seasonal influenza viruses and influenza-associated admission rate in public hospitals were at high levels. Currently, the circulating influenza viruses were predominately influenza A(H1), showing a shift from influenza A(H3) which was the dominating virus during January to March this year. The current influenza season is expected to persist for a period of time and more outbreaks and severe cases might be recorded in the upcoming weeks.

The weekly number of institutional influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks reported to the CHP were 29 and 57 in the past two weeks respectively, showing a significant increase as compared to about 10 outbreaks recorded per week in the first half of April. In the first 4 days of this week (28 April to 1 May 2024), 29 outbreaks were recorded. Among these 115 outbreaks, 53 occurred in primary schools, 14 in kindergartens/ child care centres and 13 in secondary schools.

In addition, as of 1 May, a total of 22 cases of paediatric influenza-associated severe complication/death have been recorded in this season, in which three of them were fatal. Three quarters of the cases (15 cases) were known to have not yet received the 2023/24 seasonal influenza vaccination.



Young children, the elderly and patients with chronic diseases are prone to influenza infection and its complications. As schools and organisations are collective assembly places, infectious diseases such as influenza and other respiratory infections could be easily spread among people through their daily contacts. Sources of infection could come from staff, visitors or students (especially those having active symptoms). In this regard, we would like to urge you to reinforce preventive measures in schools, kindergartens and child care centres so as to mitigate the impact of seasonal influenza.

Schools should actively check the body temperature of all students every day during this influenza season when they arrive at school so as to identify students with fever. This additional measure should continue until the local influenza activity returns to the baseline level. By then, the CHP will issue another letter to inform you.

To prevent outbreaks of influenza and other respiratory infections, it is of prime importance that children with fever (oral temperature higher than 37.5°C, or ear temperature higher than 38°C), regardless of the presence of respiratory symptoms, should not be allowed to attend school. Staff should refrain from work if they have fever or respiratory symptoms.

It is also important to measure and record students' body temperature properly. Please refer to Section 2.3 of the "Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Schools /Kindergartens /Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres /Child Care Centres" published by the CHP for detailed information on monitoring of body temperature, which can be accessed at: https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_in_schools_kindergartens_kindergartens_cum_child_care-centres_child_care_centres.pdf.

If you notice an increase in fever or respiratory illnesses among students or staff, please report promptly to our Central Notification Office (Tel: 2477 2772; Fax: 2477 2770; Email: diseases@dh.gov.hk) for prompt epidemiological investigations and appropriate control measures.

High-risk groups such as children, the elderly and patients with chronic diseases are urged to receive seasonal influenza vaccination as early as possible for enhanced personal protection. Schools should continue to advise students and staff to maintain personal, hand and environmental hygiene against influenza and other respiratory infections. The following measures are advised:

- Maintain hand hygiene, avoid touching one's eyes, mouth and nose;

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- Cover the nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly into a lidded rubbish bin, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly;
- Wear a surgical mask when getting into contact with persons with fever or respiratory symptoms;
- The public should also wear a surgical mask when taking public transportation or staying at crowded places;
- High risk persons should wear a surgical mask when visiting public place; and
- Build up good body immunity by having a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

For the latest information on influenza, please visit the CHP's influenza page at <https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/14843.html>.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr SK CHUANG)

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