

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (140) in DH SEB CD/8/27/1 Pt.22

January 3, 2018

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

**Alert on Increase in Activity of Seasonal Influenza in Hong Kong
and Neighboring Regions**

I would like to update you that the local seasonal influenza activity has increased in the past two weeks. We anticipated that the seasonal influenza activity will continue to increase and the winter influenza season in Hong Kong will arrive soon.

The positive percentage of seasonal influenza viruses among respiratory specimens received by the Centre for Health Protection increased from 3.93% in the week ending December 16 to 6.02% and 9.32% in the following two weeks. The circulating influenza viruses in the past two weeks were predominantly influenza B, with low influenza A activity.

Globally, influenza activity also continued to increase in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere. Worldwide, influenza A(H3N2) and B viruses accounted for the majority of influenza detections. The 2017/18 winter influenza season has already started in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Japan. In North America, influenza A (H3N2) was the predominating virus. In Europe, influenza A and influenza B viruses were co-circulating.

In Mainland China, the winter influenza season has arrived in both Southern and Northern China with an increasing trend of influenza activities. In Southern China, the proportion of ILI cases in emergency and outpatient departments reported by sentinel hospitals was 4.3% in the week ending December 24, higher than that reported in the previous week (3.7%) and that in the corresponding period in 2014-2016 (2.4%, 2.8%, 3.3%). In Northern China, that proportion was 5.2%, higher than that reported in the previous week (4.9%) and that in the corresponding period in 2014-2016 (3.9%, 2.7%, 3.5%). The positive percentage of influenza detections was 40.2%. The predominant circulating virus was influenza B (78.1% in Southern China and 55.7% in Northern China).



In Guangdong, the influenza activity has been increasing in the past few weeks. In the week ending December 24, the proportion of ILI cases among sentinel hospitals was 4.90% as compared with 3.96% in the previous week. The percentage of respiratory specimens tested positive for influenza was 20.75% as compared with 14.11% in the previous week. The predominating virus was influenza B. This winter influenza season arrived earlier than the past two years and the surveillance indicators showed that the influenza activity was higher than that in the same period in the past few years. However, the overall influenza activity in Guangdong so far was within the expected range.

In Taiwan, the influenza season has also arrived with increasing influenza activity. In the week ending December 30, the proportion of ILI cases in emergency department was 12.7% which was above the threshold of 11.4%. The predominating virus was influenza B which constituted 77% of the influenza detections.

Members of the public should maintain good personal protection against influenza. Particularly, children, the elderly and those with underlying illnesses are urged to get vaccinated as early as possible to prevent seasonal influenza as it takes about two weeks for antibodies to develop in the body after vaccination. They should promptly seek medical advice if influenza-like symptoms develop so that appropriate treatment can be initiated as early as possible to prevent potential complications.

Young children, elderly people 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 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 when they arrive at school so as to identify students with fever.

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 symptom, should not be allowed to attend school. They should be advised to seek medical advice and should avoid school till 48 hours after the fever has subsided. Staff should also check their temperature before work every day and staff with respiratory illnesses or fever should refrain from work.

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:

http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_in_schools_kindergartens_kindergartens_cum_child_care-centres_child_care_centres.pdf

Besides receiving seasonal influenza vaccination as early as possible for personal protection, the following measures are advised to prevent influenza and respiratory tract infections:

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70-80% alcohol-based handrub as an effective alternative;
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin;
- Put on a surgical mask when respiratory symptoms develop;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When influenza is prevalent, avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places; high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks in such places; and
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

If you notice an increase in respiratory illnesses or absenteeism among children/students, clients or staff, please report promptly to our Central Notification Office (Tel: 2477 2772; Fax: 2477 2770) for immediate epidemiological investigations and outbreak control. For the latest information on influenza activity, please visit the CHP's pages below for more information:

- The influenza page (http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/14843.html); and
- The weekly Flu Express report (http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/2108.html).

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. Yonnie Lam)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health