

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (80) in DH SEB CD/8/7/1

14 November 2012

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

Vigilance against Chickenpox and Scarlet Fever

I would like to urge you to stay vigilant in prevention and control of chickenpox and scarlet fever in your school/centre as the recent corresponding surveillance data from the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has shown a gradual increase in chickenpox and scarlet fever activities in Hong Kong.

CHP has received 743 cases of chickenpox notifications in October, as compared with 390 in September. The weekly number of notification of chickenpox has been gradually increasing from 147 in the week ending 6 October, 2012 to 239 in the last week (week ending 10 November). Similarly, the weekly number of scarlet fever cases recorded has also increased from 10 in the week ending 6 October to 33 in the last week.

Chickenpox is a common childhood infection. Chickenpox is transmitted by direct person-to-person contact, through airborne droplets or airborne spread of the discharge from the respiratory tract, and indirectly from articles freshly soiled by discharges from the infected persons' lesions. Although chickenpox is usually a mild and self-limiting disease, those with low body resistance are more likely to suffer from complications such as skin infection, scarlet fever, pneumonia and encephalitis. Newborn babies who develop chickenpox can result in more severe illness and even death.



Scarlet fever is a bacterial infection caused by Group A Streptococcus (GAS) which mostly affects children. GAS is transmitted mainly through the respiratory route or direct contact with infected respiratory secretions. Scarlet fever classically presents with fever, sore throat, red and swollen tongue (known as strawberry tongue) and erythematous rash characterized by a 'sandpaper' texture. Complications may sometimes occur including middle ear infection, throat abscess,

pneumonia, septicaemia, meningitis, and rarely toxic shock syndrome.

To prevent outbreaks of chickenpox, scarlet fever or other respiratory infections, children with fever and respiratory symptoms are strongly advised not to attend school. Staff with fever or respiratory illnesses who are suspected to be epidemiologically linked to an outbreak should also refrain from work. For practical information on infection prevention measures, you may wish to make reference to the “Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Schools/ Kindergartens / Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres / Child Care Centres (August 2011 Edition)” which is available at http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/School_full_eng_20110822.pdf.

In addition, the following measures are advised:

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly;
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose nasal and mouth discharge properly;
- Wash hands after sneezing, coughing or cleaning the nose;
- Maintain good ventilation;
- Avoid visiting crowded places with poor ventilation;
- Wear surgical mask and seek medical advice promptly if fever or symptoms of respiratory tract infection develop; and
- Regarding chickenpox vaccination, parents can approach their family doctors for further advice and information. About 90% of persons who receive the vaccine will acquire immunity. In other words, parents should still be aware of the risk that their children may contract chickenpox even after vaccination and take necessary precautionary measures.

If you notice an increase in the number of children with symptoms of chickenpox or scarlet fever or an increase in the number of absentees, please inform the Central Notification Office of CHP as early as possible at Fax: 2477 2770 or Tel: 2477 2772. CHP will give advice on the management of such cases and take appropriate control measures. For more information, please visit the website of CHP at <http://www.chp.gov.hk>.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr Yonnie LAM)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health



衛生防護中心乃衛生署
轄下執行疾病預防
及控制的專業架構
The Centre for Health
Protection is a
professional arm of the
Department of Health for
disease prevention and
control