

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (30) in DH SEB CD/8/50/1 Pt.2

December 4, 2017

Dear Principals / Persons-in-charge / Teachers,

Further Increase in Scarlet Fever Activity in Hong Kong

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 4) appealed to parents and schools/institutions for heightened vigilance against scarlet fever (SF) as its activity has sharply increased last week and reached a very high level.

According to the CHP's surveillance data, the weekly number of SF cases increased from 48 in the week of November 19 to 94 in the last week (week of November 26). Regarding SF outbreaks in schools/institutions, as of December 3, eight outbreaks (five kindergartens/child care centres and three primary schools) affecting 22 pupils/children were recorded in November.

While SF has occurred throughout the year locally, a seasonal pattern for SF in Hong Kong with higher activity was observed from May to June and from November to March in the past few years. The activity of SF has increased again since November this year. Based on the past epidemiological pattern, we expect that the SF activity will remain at a higher level in the coming few months. Parents have to take extra care of their children in maintaining strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene.

A total of 1947 cases were reported in the first 11 months of 2017, representing a marked increase from the figures for the same period in 2016 (1244 cases) and 2015 (1060 cases). The epidemiological features of the cases in 2017 were similar to those in previous years.

Among the 1947 SF cases reported this year, they comprise 1156 males and 791 females aged from two months to 43 years (median: five years), nearly all of which (1863, 95.7 per cent) were under 10 years. Most presented with mild illnesses. Among them, 695 cases (35.7 per cent) required hospitalisation. While one severe case reported in March required admission to an intensive care unit, no deaths have been recorded so far.



SF is a bacterial infection caused by Group A Streptococcus. It mostly affects children. They are transmitted through either respiratory droplets or direct contact with infected respiratory secretions.

It usually starts with a fever and sore throat. Headache, vomiting and abdominal pain may also occur. The tongue may have a distinctive strawberry-like (red and bumpy) appearance. A sandpaper texture-like rash would commonly begin on the first or second day of onset over the upper trunk and neck which spreads to the limbs. The rash is usually more prominent in armpits, elbows and groin areas. It usually subsides after one week and is followed by skin peeling over fingertips, toes and groin areas.

SF is sometimes complicated with middle ear infection, throat abscess, chest infection, meningitis, bone or joint problems, damage to kidneys, liver and heart, and rarely toxic shock syndrome. SF can be effectively treated by appropriate antibiotics. People suspected to have SF should consult a doctor promptly.

There are no vaccines available against SF. Members of the public are advised to take heed of health advice below:

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- Always keep hands clean and wash with liquid soap when they are dirtied by mouth and nasal discharge;
- Cover your nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and mouth discharge properly;
- Avoid sharing personal items such as eating utensils and towels;
- Maintain good ventilation; and
- Children suffering from SF should refrain from attending school or child care setting until fever has subsided and they have been treated with antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

If you notice an increase in the number of your staff or students with symptoms of SF, 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/en/view_content/23359.html.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. SK CHUANG)

For Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health