

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (35) in DH CDB/8/50/1 Pt.2
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18 December 2019

Dear Principals / Persons-in-charge / Teachers,

Increase in Scarlet Fever Activity in Hong Kong

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 18) appealed to parents and schools/institutions for heightened vigilance against scarlet fever (SF) as its activity has been increasing in the past few weeks and reached a high level.

According to the CHP's surveillance data, the weekly number of SF cases increased from 16 in the week ending November 23 to around 40 in the subsequent two weeks, and further increased to 78 in the week ending December 14. In the first three days of this week (as of December 17), 46 cases have been recorded. In November, six institutional outbreaks were recorded as compared with five in October. In December (as of December 17), there were seven institutional outbreaks occurring in six kindergartens/child care centres and one primary school, with a total of 18 children affected.

In the first 11 months of this year, 1,351 SF cases have been recorded as compared with 1,909 and 1,942 cases recorded in the same period in 2018 and 2017 respectively. The epidemiological and clinical features of the cases recorded this year were largely similar to those in previous years. Among the 1,351 cases, there were 776 males and 575 females with ages ranging from five months to 64 years (median: six years). The majority (92.5%) of the cases affected children aged 10 years or below. 425 (31.5%) cases required hospitalisation, with two cases requiring admission to intensive care units. In 2019, there was one fatal case recorded (as of December 17).



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 since late November this year. Based on the past epidemiological pattern, we expect that the SF activity will remain at a high level in the coming few months. Parents have to take extra care of their children in maintaining strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene.

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 with a tissue paper while sneezing or coughing and dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin 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 <https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/23359.html>.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'SK CHUANG', is positioned above the printed name.

(Dr. SK CHUANG)

For Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health