

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (101) in DH CDB/9/12/5 Pt.1

24 November 2023

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

Vigilance against Respiratory Tract Infection

We would like to draw your attention to a recent increase in activity of some respiratory pathogens other than influenza virus in Hong Kong and urge schools to maintain vigilance against respiratory tract infection.

Although the local seasonal influenza activity has decreased, laboratory data from respiratory specimens from community and hospitals showed a change in the detection rates of different respiratory pathogens. As at the week ending 18 November 2023, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for parainfluenza viruses has increased from about 1% in early September to about 5% and that for adenovirus increased from about 2% to about 4%. On the other hand, the percentage for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) decreased from about 9% in early September to about 1% whereas that of other respiratory pathogens remained relatively stable. The changes in respiratory pathogens are seasonal in nature. Parainfluenza viruses and adenovirus are respiratory viruses mainly affect young children with potential of outbreak in school setting. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) has recorded sporadic school outbreaks involving parainfluenza viruses and *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* recently

The aforesaid respiratory pathogens mainly spread by droplets or direct contact with infectious secretions. As schools are collective assembly places, infectious diseases could easily spread among people through daily contacts. Sources of infection could come from staff, visitors or students (especially those having active symptoms). In this regard, you are urged to reinforce preventive measures in your institution so as to mitigate the impact of respiratory infection.

To prevent outbreaks of respiratory infections, students 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 be alert of their own conditions and should refrain from work if they have fever or respiratory symptoms. CHP has issued guidelines to schools on prevention of communicable diseases 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_are_centres.pdf



If you notice an increase in fever or respiratory symptoms 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.

Schools should continue to advise students and staff to maintain personal, hand and environmental hygiene against respiratory infections. The following measures are advised to prevent respiratory infections:

- Surgical masks can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- 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;
- 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; and
- Build up good body immunity by having a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

As many respiratory pathogens including influenza virus may have increasing activity and community transmission during winter, members of the public including young children are strongly urged to receive vaccination as early as possible for effective protection against COVID-19 and influenza. Details of receiving both COVID-19 vaccination and seasonal influenza vaccination are available online (<https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106096.html>).

Thank you for your unfailing support in prevention and control of communicable diseases.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. SK CHUANG)
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health