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Dear Doctors,

Vigilance against hepatitis A

I would like to draw your attention to an upsurge of hepatitis A infection recorded in the first quarter this year. As of 4 March, there are 33 cases of hepatitis A recorded in 2015 that is more than those in the corresponding period of the past three years. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, there were 12 cases of hepatitis A recorded in the first three months of each year.

The 33 cases recorded this year involve 17 females and 16 males. Their ages range from 11-66 years old (median = 33 years old). All cases were stable and there was no fatality. The 33 persons were sporadic cases (散發病例) living in different districts in the territory, with eight cases living in Hong Kong region, nine in Kowloon region and 16 in the New Territories. Investigation is ongoing to study whether there are epidemiological linkages.

Hepatitis A may be asymptomatic but for symptomatic patients, the clinical presentation is characterised by poor appetite, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, upper abdominal discomfort, jaundice and tea-coloured urine. The illness may last for a few weeks but may rarely take months to resolve. Unlike hepatitis B and C, hepatitis A infection does not cause chronic liver disease and is rarely fatal, but it can cause debilitating symptoms and fulminant hepatitis, which is associated with high mortality.

Hepatitis A is usually transmitted by faecal-oral route either through contaminated drinks or food such as shellfish, or directly from person to person. For patients with hepatitis A, please advise them to observe hygiene at all times to prevent further spreading of the disease. From onset of illness for 2 weeks or until 7 days after the appearance of jaundice, it is advisable to wear gloves and protective gowns when handling soiled materials by the patient.



If you encounter cases fulfilling the reporting criteria of viral hepatitis, please report the case to Central Notification Office (CENO) of the Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health by fax (2477 2770), by phone (2477 2772) or via the CENO On-line website (<http://www.chp.gov.hk/ceno>).

Thank you for your ongoing support in combating communicable diseases in Hong Kong.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'SK CHUANG', is centered on the page.

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