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February 2, 2015

Dear Manager / Infection Control Officer,

Very High Influenza Activity in Hong Kong

We would like to inform you that the current influenza activity in Hong Kong is very high. Vigilance should be maintained to prevent influenza outbreaks in institutions. The overall local influenza activity has continued to increase since late December 2014 and rapidly reached a high level comparable to the peak levels in previous seasons with high activities. It may further increase in the coming weeks.

The latest surveillance data of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health showed that among respiratory specimens received by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch, the percentage tested positive for influenza viruses increased from 9.22% in the week ending December 27, 2014, to 30.96% in the week ending January 24, 2015. Over 95% of influenza virus detections were A(H3N2). Besides, the number of institutional influenza-like illness outbreaks also rose from eight (affecting 54 persons) in the week ending January 3 to 93 (affecting 459 persons) in that ending January 31. The outbreaks in the past four weeks mainly occurred in primary schools (33.5%), residential care homes for the elderly (31.2%) and kindergartens or child care centers (14%).

The CHP has collaborated with the Hospital Authority and private hospitals to monitor influenza associated intensive care unit (ICU) admissions or deaths (aged 18 years or above) since January 2, 2015. As of February 2 noon, there were 162 cases of influenza associated ICU admission or death (including 133 cases involving elderly aged 65 years or above), and 11 severe paediatric influenza infection (aged below 18 years). In the past week (January 25-31), 59 adult cases and five cases of severe paediatric influenza infection were recorded in the same



period. A total of 64 severe cases among all age groups were recorded in the past week, which was more than the highest weekly number of 33 recorded during influenza seasons since 2011. Moreover, the hospital admission rate of influenza among elderly aged 65 years or above was at a high level, exceeding the highest rates recorded in the past few years.

Young children, elderly and patients with chronic diseases are more prone to influenza infection and its complications. As institutions and organizations are collective assembly places, infectious diseases such as influenza could easily spread among people through their daily contact. Sources of infection could come from staff, visitors or clients (especially those just discharged from hospitals).

To prevent outbreaks of influenza or other respiratory infections, clients or staff with acute febrile illness should not attend institution/organization till 48 hours after the fever has subsided. Besides, residents with fever and respiratory symptoms should be promptly isolated. Guidelines on prevention of communicable diseases in residential care homes for elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities issued by the CHP can be accessed at the following links respectively:
http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_in_residential_care_homes_for_the_elderly.pdf; and
http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guideline_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_rchd.pdf.

In addition, the following measures are advised to prevent influenza and respiratory tract infections:

- To receive seasonal influenza vaccination for personal protection;
- To build up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking;
- To maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- To keep hands clean and wash hands properly;
- To cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and mouth discharge properly;
- To wash hands after sneezing, coughing or cleaning the nose;
- To maintain good ventilation;
- To avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places when influenza is prevalent; **high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks when staying in such places**; and
- To wear surgical mask and seek medical advice promptly if symptoms of respiratory tract infection or fever develop.

If you notice an increase in respiratory illnesses or absenteeism among your clients or staff, please report promptly to our Central Notification Office (Tel: 2477 2772; Fax: 2477 2770) for immediate epidemiological investigations and outbreak control. For the latest information on influenza activity, please visit the website of the CHP (www.chp.gov.hk).

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