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Dear Doctor,

Vigilance against upsurge of pertussis

We would like to alert you of the recent increase in pertussis activity globally and provide an update on the latest situation in Hong Kong.

Pertussis is endemic worldwide, with resurgences observed every 3-5 years. Globally, recent increased levels of pertussis have been observed following the lower disease circulation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries including those in Europe, Mainland and Philippines are facing a resurgence of pertussis due to various reasons. For example, expected epidemic peaks, presence of unvaccinated or not up-to-date vaccinated individuals, waning immunity, decreased contribution of natural boosting in the overall population during the COVID-19 pandemic period. In Europe/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries, more than 32,000 cases were recorded between January and March 2024. In Mainland, a significant upsurge in pertussis cases was recorded in the first three months of 2024, with 59,458 cases and 13 deaths reported which surpassed pre COVID-19 era. In the Philippines, a total of 2,521 pertussis cases, including 96 deaths, were reported since the start of 2024 (as of 11 May), compared to 20 and 4 pertussis cases in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

As of 23 May 2024, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) has already recorded 28 cases of pertussis this year. Infants and children are the most affected group, accounting for 68% (19 cases) of all cases. Among these children cases, 3 were infants under six months of age for whom the primary series of 3 doses of pertussis vaccine was not completed. For the 16 children aged between 6 months and 17 years, 15 had received vaccination according to Hong Kong schedule and one had unknown vaccination history. For the 9 adult cases (aged between 24 and 71 years), 3 of them reported they had completed pertussis vaccination, 5 with unknown vaccination history and one was unvaccinated. Among all cases, six were imported from Mainland/overseas places and the rest were locally acquired infection.



Pertussis vaccines are safe and effective in reducing the risk of severe disease in infants and young children. Pertussis is a highly transmissible disease and may cause severe morbidity and mortality among newborn babies and infants, who are

too young to be fully vaccinated. The disease is usually milder for those who have received vaccination against pertussis. Vaccination in a timely manner protects children from this potentially dangerous disease. Delays in vaccination put those vulnerable at risk of disease and increases the chances of further spread.

Furthermore, maternal pertussis vaccination is effective in preventing infant hospitalizations and deaths from pertussis. Pregnant women are recommended to receive pertussis vaccination between 26 and 34 weeks of every pregnancy and preferably before 35 weeks or at least 15 days before the end of pregnancy to maximize the passive antibody transfer to the infant.

In view of the recent pertussis resurgence, we would like to advise you to stay vigilant. For patients who have cough with paroxysms of coughing, inspiratory whoop or post-tussive vomiting that lasts for at least 2 weeks without an apparent cause, please consider the possibility of pertussis and arrange testing as appropriate. Pertussis is a statutory notifiable disease in Hong Kong. Cases of pertussis should be notified to the Central Notification Office of the CHP via fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or CENO On-line (https://cdis.chp.gov.hk/CDIS_CENO_ONLINE/ceno.html). Please implement appropriate infection control measures at your healthcare facilities to prevent any potential spread from suspected pertussis cases.

In addition, please also advise pregnant women to receive pertussis vaccination; as well as infants and children to receive age-appropriate pertussis vaccination. Besides, pregnant women and infants aged under six months who have not completed the primary series of pertussis vaccination are not advised to travel to places with outbreaks of pertussis.

Please draw the attention of the healthcare professionals and supporting staff in your institution/working with you to the above. Further information on pertussis is available from the CHP's webpage (<https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/101463.html>).

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

Yours faithfully,



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