

Anti-mosquito measures urged on festive occasion

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (September 21) urged the public to carry out preventive measures to avoid mosquito bites while celebrating Mid-Autumn Festival.

There are many mosquito-borne diseases, including dengue fever (DF), chikungunya fever, Japanese encephalitis (JE), malaria, yellow fever and Zika virus infection. These diseases are endemic in many overseas countries. In recent years, local cases of DF and JE have been recorded in Hong Kong.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Regarding DF, a record high of 29 local cases have been detected since mid-August this year. The public are reminded that eliminating breeding sites for mosquitoes and avoiding mosquito bites are key to preventing DF. When doing outdoor activities such as visiting parks, grass pitches and beaches during the Mid-Autumn Festival holidays, one needs to apply DEET-containing mosquito repellents to exposed parts of the body and clothing for better personal protection."

In addition, members of the public who intend to travel during the Mid-Autumn Festival holidays should stay alert to the DF situation and other mosquito-borne diseases in their destinations and carry out anti-mosquito measures as necessary.

Regarding the latest DF situation, as of yesterday, a total of 108 cases had been confirmed in 2018, comprising 29 local and 79 imported cases mainly from Thailand (30), the Philippines (14) and Cambodia (9). From September 14 to 20, two imported DF cases were recorded and the patients had been to Bangladesh (one case) and Thailand (one case) in the incubation period.

DF remains endemic in some areas in Asia and beyond. The latest figures for 2018 revealed that 57 129 cases had been recorded in Thailand, 2 045 in Singapore (since December 31, 2017) and 119 in Japan. In Taiwan, 117 local cases have been recorded to date in 2018. In the Americas, 29 665 cases have been filed to date in Mexico in 2018.

The public should take heed of the following advice on mosquito control:

- Thoroughly check all gully traps, roof gutters, surface channels and drains to prevent blockage;
- Scrub and clean drains and surface channels with an alkaline detergent compound at least once a week to remove any deposited mosquito eggs;
- Properly dispose of refuse, such as soft drink cans, empty bottles and boxes, in covered litter containers;
- Completely change the water of flowers and plants at least once a week.

- The use of saucers should be avoided if possible;
- Level irregular ground surfaces before the rainy season;
 - Avoid staying in shrubby areas; and
 - Take personal protective measures such as wearing light-coloured long-sleeved clothes and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or uncovered areas of the body when doing outdoor activities.

To reduce the risk of infections being spread by mosquitoes, apart from general measures, travellers returning from affected areas should apply insect repellent for 14 days (DF) or at least 21 days (Zika virus infection) upon arrival in Hong Kong. Among the imported DF cases recorded in Hong Kong since 2015 (as of yesterday), the most common places for acquiring the infection included Thailand (88), Indonesia (65), the Philippines (65), India (26), Malaysia (23), Vietnam (23) and Cambodia (20). People should pay particular attention to anti-mosquito measures when travelling to these countries and after coming back to Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor. DEET-containing insect repellents are effective and the public should take heed of the tips below:

- Read carefully the label instructions first;
- Apply right before entering an area with risk of mosquito bites;
- Apply on exposed skin and clothing;
- Use DEET of up to 30 per cent for pregnant women and up to 10 per cent for children*;
- Apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent; and
- Re-apply only when needed and follow the instructions.

* For children who travel to countries or areas where mosquito-borne diseases are endemic or epidemic and where exposure is likely, those aged 2 months or above can use DEET-containing insect repellents with a DEET concentration of up to 30 per cent.

Currently, vaccines are available in Hong Kong as preventive measures against yellow fever and JE, while anti-malarial chemoprophylaxis is also available. Members of the public planning to travel to affected areas should consult their doctors for advice on vaccination or chemoprophylaxis. Travellers planning to receive yellow fever vaccination and travel health medical advice should arrange travel health consultation with the DH's Travel Health Service at least six to eight weeks before the trip.

The public may visit the CHP website, the latest Travel Health News and tips for using insect repellents for more information.