

CHP announces end of influenza season

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 25) announced the end of the influenza season which started in early April this year, although the public is reminded to continue to maintain personal, hand, and environmental hygiene to prevent respiratory infections including COVID-19.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "The influenza activity in Hong Kong had continued to increase since entering the influenza season in early April. It then started to decrease gradually after reaching the peak in late April, and returned to the baseline level in the week ending May 20. The predominating virus during the period was influenza A(H1), accounting for around 80 per cent of the respiratory specimens collected and with subtype results by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) and the Hospital Authority."

According to the latest surveillance data, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses peaked at 18.2 per cent in the week ending April 22, and declined to 3.83 per cent in the week ending May 20. The admission rate with the principal diagnosis of influenza in public hospitals also decreased from a peak of 1.13 (per 10 000 population) to 0.23 (per 10 000 population).

Moreover, the weekly number of reported influenza-like illness outbreaks decreased from 59 in the last week of April to 24 and 25 respectively in the first two weeks of May. It further plummeted to 10 in the week ending May 20. For severe or death cases, there were 46 to 48 severe influenza cases (including death cases) in every week from April 9 to May 6, while the figure for the week ending May 20 was 32.

The surveillance data above indicated the end of the influenza season which started in early April this year. The spokesman reminded the public that although the seven-week long influenza season has ended, people aged six months or above who have not yet received the seasonal influenza vaccination in the 2022/23 season can still receive the vaccine to enhance personal protection.

On the other hand, the CHP has been closely monitoring the local COVID-19 situation. Latest data revealed that the upward trend of local COVID-19 activity has significantly slowed. The number of newly recorded positive nucleic acid test laboratory detections in the last seven days (May 18 to 24) ranged from 467 to 554 with no significant upward trend. During the period of May 17 to 23, the number of daily new admissions to public hospitals hovered around 384 to 489, while the number of newly reported critical or severe cases in public hospitals ranged from 24 to 43 daily, without any indication of a further increase at this stage. In addition, there have been no major outbreaks in venues where targeted groups are concentrated, such as schools, residential care homes for the elderly and

residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

Regarding COVID-19 variants, according to the genetic characterisation by the CHP's PHLSB on the specimens tested positive for COVID-19 as well as reported severe and death cases for COVID-19, the XBB and its sub-lineages have become the predominating variant locally during May 18 to 24, accounting for 88.3 per cent of all characterised specimens, while among that XBB.1.16 accounted for 3.7 per cent, and other non-XBB variants (including descendant lineages of BA.2) accounted for around 12 per cent. After analysing the clinical presentations of local cases, it does not show that infection with the XBB variant is more severe than infection with other Omicron variants.

The spokesman said, "The CHP will continue to closely monitor the situation of SARS-CoV-2 mutations and the risks with emphasis on the protection of high-risk groups. We call on those who have not completed the first three doses of vaccine, as well as persons in the high-risk groups who have not yet received vaccine boosters as per experts' recommendation, to get vaccinated as early as possible for protection of oneself and one's family. High-risk groups are encouraged to receive an additional vaccine booster six months after their last dose or COVID-19 infection, whichever is later."

Apart from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, the spokesman appealed again to symptomatic individuals, even if the symptoms are mild, that they should wear surgical masks and seek medical attention promptly to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to high-risk persons. Personal, hand and environmental hygiene should also be maintained at all times.

For latest information, please refer to the [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) published by the CHP.