

## CHP announces local HIV/AIDS situation in third quarter 2024 (with photo)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced today (November 26) that a total of 85 new cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection and 22 new cases of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) were reported in the third quarter of 2024 in Hong Kong. The prevalence of HIV infection among the general public in Hong Kong remained at 0.1 per cent, well below the global average. The number of new cases has decreased since the peak in 2015 and there were fewer than 90 new cases for two consecutive quarters, demonstrating the effectiveness of AIDS control and prevention in Hong Kong. The CHP urges people with a history of unsafe sex to undergo early HIV testing to keep track of their health status, and those infected persons to receive treatment as early as possible in order to suppress the virus.

"The 85 new HIV cases involve 72 males and 13 females, with ages ranging from 18 to 75. Among the cases with a reported route of transmission, 65 cases (97 per cent) acquired the infection via sexual contact, including 44 who acquired the infection via homosexual or bisexual contact and 21 via heterosexual contact. The cases were mainly reported by three sources: public hospitals, clinics and laboratories (41 cases); the DH's Social Hygiene Clinics (14 cases); and private hospitals, clinics and laboratories (14 cases). The cumulative total of HIV infections reported locally since 1984 is 12 308," said Dr Bonnie Wong, the Consultant (Special Preventive Programme) of the Public Health Services Branch of the CHP.

"Among the new AIDS cases, which included 20 males and two females, 18 (81.8 per cent) were diagnosed with HIV infection at the time of progression to AIDS, and the most common AIDS-defining illness remained Pneumocystis pneumonia. Since 1985, a cumulative total of 2 545 confirmed AIDS cases have been reported in Hong Kong," Dr Wong said.

She stressed that, although the number of new cases has dropped, the proportion of late presenters among newly reported cases in Hong Kong has increased from 28.5 per cent in 2014 to 47 per cent in 2023, and required more attention.

Late presenters refer to individuals with a very low CD4 cells count (less than 200 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>) at the time of HIV diagnosis. Late presentation indicates that these individuals were not diagnosed and put on treatment in a timely manner at an earlier stage of infection, resulting in a weakened immune system as the virus attacks CD4 cells. Late presentation can lead to an increased risk of opportunistic infections and malignancies, leading to a higher mortality rate. In addition, as a result of an unsuppressed viral load, late presenters contribute to an increased risk of HIV transmission in the community.

Having taken into consideration the latest local epidemiology, scientific evidence, recommendations from the World Health Organization and overseas practices, the Scientific Committee on AIDS and STI (Sexually Transmitted Infections) recently published "Recommendations on HIV Testing in Hong Kong" (The Recommendations).

"In view of the rising trend of late presentation and the fact that HIV infection is mainly acquired through sexual transmission, early detection of infection is essential. People who have had sex should get HIV testing at least once to keep track of their health status, and that people with risk behaviours should undergo regular screening. People with HIV should seek specialist care and HIV treatment as soon as possible for viral suppression and for health restoration," said Dr Lee Cheuk-kwong, the Chairman of the Scientific Committee on AIDS and STI, today.

The Recommendations contain sections on who to get tested, how to test, consent, post-test care and referral pathways, serving to provide references and practical guidance to healthcare professionals and frontline service providers in the community. Details of the Recommendations are available on the CHP's website at [www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24003.html](http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24003.html).

HIV is the cause of AIDS. Sexual transmission remains the major mode of HIV transmission. Members of the public should use condoms consistently and properly to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV. In addition, undergoing HIV antibody testing early is an important component in HIV prevention.

There are community resources available which enable members of the public to undergo HIV antibody testing. Members of the public can reserve a free, anonymous and confidential HIV antibody test by visiting the HIV Testing Service website ([www.hivtest.gov.hk](http://www.hivtest.gov.hk)) or calling the AIDS Hotline (2780 2211). They can also order HIV self-test kits (oral fluid-based and blood-based (finger prick) testing kits) on the HIV Testing Service website, and collect the self-test kits at various pick-up locations in Hong Kong. In addition, members of the public can access to the above services via the link to HIV Testing Service website after downloading the "Department of Health @DH Mobile App".

Dr Wong stressed that HIV infection is a manageable chronic disease. Early HIV treatment with antiretroviral drugs can effectively prevent the progression to AIDS and other complications. Lifelong antiretroviral treatment is indicated for all people with HIV, and the treatment remarkably improves their health and possibility of survival. Moreover, those who achieve sustained viral suppression to an undetectable level with treatment will not transmit the virus through sex, i.e. Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

The public may visit the following pages for more information on HIV/AIDS: the Virtual AIDS Office ([www.aids.gov.hk](http://www.aids.gov.hk)), the Red Ribbon Centre ([www.rrc.gov.hk](http://www.rrc.gov.hk)), the HIV Testing Service website ([www.hivtest.gov.hk](http://www.hivtest.gov.hk)) and the Gay Men HIV Information website ([www.21171069.gov.hk](http://www.21171069.gov.hk)).

