

CHP announces two new confirmed melioidosis infection cases over past week

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (August 9) said that two new confirmed melioidosis infection cases had been recorded in the past week (August 2 to 8).

The first case is an imported case involving a 42-year-old female. She presented with pain and swelling on a wound on her foot in her place of residence overseas and sought medical attention in early July. She arrived in Hong Kong on July 20, and attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Tseung Kwan O Hospital for medical attention due to persistent symptoms on July 29. Her clinical sample was confirmed positive for *Burkholderia pseudomallei* upon testing. She was admitted for treatment and has been in stable condition. Epidemiological investigations revealed that the patient lived overseas during the incubation period and her wound had contact with soil and muddy water at her place of residence.

The second case involves a 62-year-old male with underlying illnesses. He lives in Tuen Mun. He developed a cough and sought medical attention from private doctors in early July. He attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Pok Oi Hospital on August 1 due to a fever, persistent cough and shortness of breath, and was admitted on the same day. He is now in serious condition. His clinical sample was confirmed positive for *Burkholderia pseudomallei* upon testing. The CHP is investigating the infection source of the case. Epidemiological investigations are ongoing.

So far, seven melioidosis infection cases have been recorded in Hong Kong this year. In 2023, 17 melioidosis infection cases were recorded.

A spokesman for the CHP reiterated that person-to-person transmission and animal-to-human transmission are rare, but melioidosis bacteria can survive in the local environment. Melioidosis is an endemic disease in Hong Kong and melioidosis cases have been recorded in Hong Kong each year. According to literature, infection cases are more common after typhoons or storms. The bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei* of melioidosis in soil and muddy water may become exposed to the ground after typhoons or storms, and the bacteria could spread more easily with strong winds or storms. As such, the number of melioidosis cases may increase.

The CHP reminded members of the public that melioidosis can be spread by contaminated soil and water during and after typhoons and storms. Where practicable, people should stay indoors during typhoons and storms, avoid travelling to areas with potential flooding, and do not wade in or have contact with muddy water and soil. In addition, high-risk individuals should avoid paths near stormwater drains where aerosols may be generated from contaminated water.

Members of the public should also take the following preventive measures against infection:

- Avoid contact with contaminated soil;
- Wear appropriate protective clothing or footwear when participating in activities with possible contact with soil or water, e.g. using gloves and wearing boots. High-risk individuals may also consider wearing a surgical mask;
- Wash or shower after exposure to contaminated water or soil;
- Always clean any wounds as soon as possible and cover any cuts or grazes with waterproof dressings;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water after handling soil or gardening;
- Observe food hygiene and avoid drinking raw water; and
- Travellers can contract the disease through outdoor water sports. Risk of infection can be minimised by avoiding exposure to water sources (such as rivers, ponds or lakes) that might be contaminated.

The CHP appealed to members of the public to seek medical advice if they develop symptoms, in particular people with diabetes or other immunocompromised conditions, in order to receive appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment. For more information on melioidosis, please visit the website of the CHP at www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/24/101110.html.