

CHP appeals for vigilance against upper respiratory tract infection

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (November 5) urged the public to stay vigilant against upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) as increasing number of institutional URTI outbreaks has been recorded recently.

The CHP has received increasing reports on institutional URTI outbreaks in recent two weeks. In the past week (from October 25 to 31), there were four URTI outbreaks affecting 49 persons, and in the first four days of this week (from November 1 to 4), there were 10 URTI outbreaks affecting 73 persons. Among these 14 URTI outbreaks, majority of them occurred in primary schools (seven outbreaks, 50 per cent), followed by kindergartens/child care centres (four outbreaks, 29 per cent), and one each in a residential child care centre, a special child care centre and a special school.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Young children, the elderly and patients with chronic diseases are prone to respiratory tract infection and its complications. As schools are collective assembly places, infectious diseases could be easily spread among people through their daily contacts."

The CHP today issued letters to schools and to doctors to appeal for heightened vigilance and appropriate actions. To prevent outbreaks of respiratory tract infection including COVID-19, it is of prime importance that children with fever, regardless of the presence of respiratory symptom, should not be allowed to attend school. They should wear a mask and consult doctors promptly. Schools should actively check the body temperature of all students every day when they arrive at school so as to identify students with fever. Moreover, staff should also check their temperature before work every day. Students and staff with fever or respiratory illnesses should refrain from school and seek medical attention immediately.

"The symptoms of URTI and other respiratory infections, including influenza and COVID-19, could be similar. It could be difficult to differentiate them clinically. Testing of respiratory pathogens at an earlier stage is crucial to facilitate earlier case detection and treatment, and hence reduce community spread. Doctors are urged to remain vigilant and arrange testing for respiratory infections for all patients presenting with acute respiratory symptoms," the spokesman added.

Meanwhile, the public should maintain good personal and environmental hygiene against respiratory illnesses. They are advised to:

- Receive a seasonal influenza vaccination for personal protection;
- Surgical mask can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching one's eyes, mouth and nose;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub;
- Cover the nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly into a lidded rubbish bin, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly;
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress; and
- Seek medical consultations promptly if necessary.

Members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and those with chronic diseases, should wear a face mask and consult a doctor promptly if they develop symptoms of respiratory tract infection.