

CHP closely monitors confirmed case of infection of novel coronavirus in Japan and revises reporting criteria

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health said today (January 16) that the CHP has been closely monitoring a new confirmed case of infection of novel coronavirus in Japan. The public is again urged to maintain strict personal, food and environmental hygiene both locally and during travel.

According to information from the health authority of Japan, the case involved a male patient in his thirties who is living in Kanagawa, Japan. The patient, who had earlier travelled to Wuhan, Hubei Province, developed a fever on January 3 and returned to Japan on January 6 and sought medical attention on the same day. He was admitted to a local hospital on January 10 and was discharged on January 15. He tested positive for the novel coronavirus on January 15. According to the patient, he did not visit the Hua Nan Seafood Market in Wuhan but had contact with a pneumonia patient while he was in Wuhan.

In view of the latest situation and risk assessment, the CHP will enhance surveillance of suspected cases and revise the reporting criteria of "Severe Respiratory Disease associated with a Novel Infectious Agent". Details are as follows:

Medical practitioners are requested to make a report to the CHP for further investigation if they encounter an individual with fever and acute respiratory illness, or pneumonia, and who had experienced one of the following within 14 days prior to the onset of symptoms: (a) visited Wuhan (regardless of whether the individual had visited wet markets or seafood markets there); or (b) visited a medical hospital in the Mainland; or (c) had close contact with a confirmed case of the novel coronavirus while that patient was symptomatic.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "The CHP will issue letters to doctors and private hospitals to inform them of the revised reporting criteria. The CHP will continue to maintain its liaisons with the World Health Organization, the National Health Commission and relevant overseas health authorities, and closely monitor the situation for risk assessment. The reporting criteria will be adjusted in a timely manner according to the prevailing situation."

The Port Health Division (PHD) of the CHP has earlier strengthened port health measures and enhanced temperature screenings of travellers with increased frequency of random checking at all boundary control points. An additional thermal imaging system dedicated for temperature screenings of travellers from flights arriving in Hong Kong from Wuhan has been put in place at Hong Kong International Airport.

Moreover, additional temperature checks using handheld infrared thermometers for all inbound travellers during the periods when the two daily high-speed trains with stops at Wuhan arriving in Hong Kong are conducted to ensure that the body temperatures of all passengers from these two trains are checked. Travellers who fulfilled the above reporting criteria will be immediately referred to public hospitals for isolation, treatment and follow-up.

The PHD has advised the MTR Corporation Limited, the Airport Authority Hong Kong and relevant airlines to strengthen the cleaning and disinfection work for high-speed trains and aircraft arriving in Hong Kong from Wuhan. Cleaning and disinfection work for the West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and airport terminal buildings have also been stepped up. Furthermore, the PHD has enhanced the dissemination of health messages through broadcasts to travellers in, for example, flight cabins and the West Kowloon Station, distribution of leaflets, displaying posters and promulgating travel health news via websites. The PHD will continue to maintain close liaisons with stakeholders of all boundary control points to update them in a timely manner about the latest situation and relevant measures.

A dedicated webpage (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html) has been set up by the CHP to provide relevant information and health advice. To address the public's concern, the CHP will announce the details of cases fulfilling the reporting criteria (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/enhanced_sur_pneumonia_wuhan_eng.pdf) on the above webpage daily to enhance transparency.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes; after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs; or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and add water to U-traps regularly to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- 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.

The public should take heed of the health advice below when travelling outside Hong Kong:

- Avoid visiting hospitals. If it is necessary to visit a hospital, put on a surgical mask and observe strict personal and hand hygiene;
- Avoid touching animals (including game), poultry/birds or their droppings;
- Avoid visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms;
- Avoid making close contact with patients, especially those with symptoms of acute respiratory infections;
- Do not consume game meat and do not patronise food premises where game meat is served;
- Adhere to food safety and hygiene rules such as avoiding consuming raw or undercooked animal products, including milk, eggs and meat, or foods which may be contaminated by animal secretions, excretions (such as urine) or contaminated products, unless they have been properly cooked, washed or peeled;
- If feeling unwell when outside Hong Kong, especially if having a fever or cough, wear a surgical mask, inform the hotel staff or tour escort and seek medical advice at once; and
- After returning to Hong Kong, consult a doctor promptly if having a fever or other symptoms, take the initiative to inform the doctor of any recent travel history and any exposure to animals, and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease.