

CHP closely monitors overseas reports on acute hepatitis cases of unknown origin amongst children

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health said today (April 22) that it is closely monitoring the recent overseas reports on acute hepatitis cases of unknown origin amongst children under 10 years old, with adenovirus found in some of the affected.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "We are closely monitoring the reports on acute hepatitis cases of unknown origin in children in Europe and the United States (US) and have contacted the World Health Organization for further information and latest investigation findings."

As a precautionary measure, the CHP has worked with the Hospital Authority to step up related surveillance.

The CHP noted that the public health authorities of the United Kingdom (UK) are investigating a rise in cases of acute hepatitis in children aged 10 or below since January 2022 who were tested negative for common causes of hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D, and E. Some of the cases were tested positive for adenovirus. There was no link of these cases to COVID-19 vaccination. As it is not usual to see this pattern of disease from adenovirus, public health authorities of the UK are actively investigating other possible contributing factors, such as another infection (including COVID-19) or an environmental cause.

Apart from the UK, hepatitis cases in children with unknown origin have been reported in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and the US. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the US recently issued a health advisory to clinicians recommending them to consider adenovirus testing in pediatric patients with hepatitis of unknown aetiology.

Adenovirus is a common respiratory virus affecting children in Hong Kong. Adenoviruses can be spread by close personal contact, respiratory droplets, and fomites. Adenoviruses most commonly cause respiratory illness, but depending on the adenovirus type they can cause other illnesses such as gastroenteritis, conjunctivitis, cystitis, and less commonly, neurological disease.

For prevention of communicable diseases including viral hepatitis and adenovirus infection, members of the public are reminded to maintain good personal, environmental and food hygiene. Sick children should also refrain from school and seek medical advice early.