

CHP continues to investigate food poisoning clusters involving passengers on flights from Nepal

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (January 10) continued to investigate a food poisoning cluster involving passengers on a flight arriving in Hong Kong from Nepal yesterday (January 9). The cluster is believed to be epidemiologically linked to a [food poisoning cluster](#) announced on January 8, in which the affected people had similar symptoms and had consumed similar food items before the onset of the illness. The two clusters involved a total of 36 people. The CHP appealed to passengers travelling on Cathay Pacific Airways Limited (CX) flights (flight number: CX640) from Kathmandu to Hong Kong and landing on January 8 and 9 to call the CHP hotline (2125 2372) for an appropriate health assessment.

The cluster reported on January 9 involved 20 persons (14 males and six females) aged between 11 and 51 coming from eight unknown families/groups. They developed food poisoning symptoms, including vomiting, diarrhoea, nausea, abdominal pain and fever, about 10 to 30 minutes after consuming in-flight meals. Thirteen of them sought medical advice upon landing in the early morning of January 9. None required hospitalisation. Other than the food served on the flight, the CHP's investigation did not find that they had consumed any common food before boarding the plane.

Regarding the cluster announced on January 8, the number of affected people has increased to 16. The six newly reported cases included one male and five females. Of the 16 people, nine were from the same exchange group, and the remaining seven do not know each other. They arrived in Hong Kong on the early morning of January 8 and developed food poisoning symptoms, including vomiting, nausea, abdominal pain and fever, about 10 to 30 minutes after having meals served on the flight. The investigation revealed that the seven persons who were not part of the exchange group had not consumed any common food before boarding the plane.

The CHP is conducting a comprehensive investigation into the two cases from various angles, including reviewing the food consumed by the symptomatic persons before the onset of illness, such as bread, fruits, beetroot salad, lamb rice, chicken rice and ice-cream, which were common food items served on the flights concerned, as well as other food items consumed at the airport or in Nepal prior to boarding. Investigators took samples for testing from the same batch of food that was not served to passengers on either flights.

The CHP is still actively investigating the incidents and does not rule out the possibility that the number of people affected may increase. Staff of the CHP and the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have conducted an inspection at the Cathay Pacific Catering Service (H.K.) Limited, which supplied the food for the flights concerned,

and the aircraft concerned to examine the food preparation process and hygiene. The investigation found that the food concerned was stored at an appropriate temperature and in an appropriate manner. However, as the beetroot salad requires more manual preparation and does not need to be reheated before consumption, the CHP has, as a precaution, instructed the premises concerned to suspend the supply of beetroot salad immediately.

The CHP has reported the cases to the World Health Organization and the Nepalese health authority, and inquired whether there are any other reports from other places of food poisoning among passengers on flights from Nepal to destinations other than Hong Kong. The CHP appealed to those who were on the flights operated by CX (flight number: CX640) from Kathmandu, Nepal, to Hong Kong on January 7 and 8 (Nepal time) to call the CHP hotline for follow-up and medical surveillance. The hotline has been in operation since January 9 and will continue until January 17, from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, and from 9am to 1pm on Saturday and Sunday. They should seek medical advice immediately if they develop symptoms of infection, such as fever or feeling unwell.

To prevent foodborne diseases, members of the public are reminded to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times. When dining out, one should:

- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters at a buffet;
- Choose pasteurised eggs, egg products or dried egg powder for dishes that often use lightly cooked or uncooked eggs;
- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Store and reheat pre-cooked or leftover foods properly before consumption;
- Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hotpot or barbecue meal;
- Handle raw and cooked foods carefully and separate them completely during the cooking process;
- Use two sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked foods;
- Avoid patronising illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Refrain from trying to use salt, vinegar, wine or wasabi to kill bacteria as they are not effective; and
- Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.