

CHP follows up on case of Candida auris

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (June 27) following up with the Hospital Authority on the first case of Candida auris detected in Hong Kong, involving a patient who has travelled to Switzerland, and reminded members of the public on the proper use of antimicrobials and maintaining personal hygiene against the disease.

The male patient, aged 48, was admitted to the intensive care unit of Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) on May 19 following pulmonary embolism. Candida auris was detected from the culture of his endotracheal aspirate obtained in mid-June which was confirmed by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch subsequently. The patient is in a stable condition and is currently under isolation in PMH. Contact tracing by the hospital is in progress.

"Candida is a fungus commonly found in the natural world, particularly in moist and warm environments. In humans, it is commonly found in body sites such as the oral cavity, the digestive tract, skin and the vagina. It is a common fungus living on or in the human body but can occasionally cause infections, especially in individuals with impaired immunity," a spokesman for the CHP explained.

Among all the species, Candida auris is more drug-resistant than other candida species. Infections have varied from being mild to potentially life-threatening or fatal, depending on which part of the body is affected and the general health of the patient. The drug category for treating the disease, however, is basically no different from the antifungal drugs generally used for treating serious fungal infections. All these drugs have been registered and are available in the local market. However, Candida auris is known to be resistant to many of these potential drugs of choice which will limit the therapeutic options and affect treatment outcome.

Globally, Candida auris has been observed to become increasingly prevalent since 2016 in many overseas regions including North America, Europe and other continents. Emergence of Candida auris has been linked with nosocomial outbreaks at healthcare facilities.

The spokesman stressed that proper use of antimicrobials and maintaining personal hygiene, especially hand hygiene, are crucial to the prevention of emergence and cross-transmission of Candida auris.

"The CHP will continue to keep abreast of international trends and the local situation of Candida auris in order to strengthen disease surveillance and implement effective preventive and control measures in public health to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in Hong Kong as appropriate," the spokesman said.