

CHP investigates food poisoning cluster

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 18) investigating a food poisoning cluster affecting 15 persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene when travelling outside Hong Kong to prevent foodborne diseases.

The cluster involved five males and 10 females aged between 57 and 94, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and fever after eating at two restaurants in Zhanjiang during a group tour to Guangdong between December 13 and 15.

Fourteen of the affected persons sought medical advice either on the Mainland or in Hong Kong. Two sought medical advice when they returned to Hong Kong while one required hospitalisation and was discharged after treatment.

Initial investigations by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed common food including oysters, abalone, shrimp, sea cucumber and fish. The incident might have been caused by norovirus or *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*.

The CHP has forwarded the case details to the Mainland health authorities and is appealing to those who participated in the three-day tour to Zhanjiang, Taishan and Jiangmen organised by E King Travel (International) Limited between December 13 and 15 to call the CHP hotline (2125 2670) for follow up and medical surveillance. The hotline will operate from tomorrow (December 19) until December 24 from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. 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.