

CHP reviews local HIV/AIDS situation in 2021

A total of 447 cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection were reported to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) in 2021, compared with 505 in 2020.

Reviewing the latest HIV/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) situation in Hong Kong, a spokesman for the CHP today (February 22) said, "Sexual transmission remained the major mode of HIV transmission. Members of the public should use condoms consistently and properly so as to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV.

"Despite a decrease in the number of reports of HIV infection in recent years when compared to the peak in 2015, a concentrated epidemic among vulnerable groups, namely young men who have sex with men, warrants our sustained attention. In addition, heterosexual transmission continues to account for a significant number of new reports."

Of the 447 HIV cases reported in 2021, which involved 367 males and 80 females, 239 (53 per cent) acquired the infection via homosexual or bisexual contact, 122 (27 per cent) via heterosexual contact and three (0.7 per cent) via drug injection. The routes of transmission of the remaining 83 cases are undetermined due to as yet incomplete information.

In the fourth quarter of 2021, 110 new cases of HIV infection were reported, taking the cumulative total of HIV infections reported locally to 11 232 since 1984.

Of the 110 HIV cases reported in the above-mentioned quarter, which involved 86 males and 24 females, 47 acquired the infection via homosexual or bisexual contact and 32 via heterosexual contact. The routes of transmission of the remaining 31 cases have yet to be determined due to inadequate information.

The new cases of the quarter were mainly reported by three major sources: public hospitals, clinics and laboratories (51 cases); the DH's AIDS Unit (19 cases); and private hospitals, clinics and laboratories (18 cases). Also, 73 of the HIV-infected people (67 per cent) have already received HIV specialist services at the DH or the Hospital Authority.

In addition, 23 new cases of AIDS were reported in this quarter, of which 12 cases (52 per cent) were attributed to homosexual or bisexual contact and 11 cases (48 per cent) were related to heterosexual contact. In this quarter, the most common AIDS-defining illness was Pneumocystis pneumonia, a kind of chest infection.

Since 1985, a cumulative total of 2 320 confirmed AIDS cases has been reported in Hong Kong.

The spokesman said, "HIV is the cause of AIDS, but lifelong HIV treatment with antiretroviral drugs effectively prevents AIDS and other complications. It also improves the quality of life and survival rate of HIV/AIDS patients, the extent of which depends on how early antiretroviral treatment is initiated. Notably, people with HIV who achieve sustained viral suppression to an undetectable level will not transmit the virus through sex, i.e. Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

"Members of the public with a history of unsafe sex should take an HIV antibody test early. They can call the DH's AIDS Hotline (2780 2211) for a free, anonymous and confidential HIV test. Key populations with a higher risk of infection should undergo regular HIV screening. HIV-positive people should seek specialist care and HIV treatment as soon as possible."

The public may visit the following pages for more information: the DH's Virtual AIDS Office (www.aids.gov.hk), the Red Ribbon Centre (www.rrc.gov.hk), the AIDS Hotline website (www.27802211.com) and the Gay Men HIV Information website (www.21171069.gov.hk).