

CHP reviews local HIV/AIDS situation in 2023

A total of 397 cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection were reported to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) in 2023, which shows a drop from the 409 cases in 2022. The HIV infections reported locally has totalled 12 038 since 1984.

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Of the 397 HIV cases reported last year, which involved 326 males and 71 females, 209 (52.6 per cent) acquired the infection via homosexual or bisexual contact, 110 (27.7 per cent) via heterosexual contact, eight (2.0 per cent) via drug injection, one (0.3 per cent) via blood or blood product transfusion outside Hong Kong, and one (0.3 per cent) via mother-to-child transmission. The routes of transmission of the remaining 68 cases have yet to be determined due to incomplete information.

A total of 95 HIV cases were reported in the fourth quarter of last year. They involved 75 males and 20 females; 50 acquired the infection via homosexual or bisexual contact, 19 via heterosexual contact, and two via drug injection. The routes of transmission of the remaining 24 cases have yet to be determined due to incomplete information.

The new cases of the fourth quarter were mainly reported by three major sources: public hospitals, clinics and laboratories (42 cases); Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) service organisations (18 cases); and private hospitals, clinics and laboratories (14 cases). Also, 66 of the newly reported cases (69.5 per cent) of the quarter have already received HIV specialist services at the DH or the Hospital Authority. A total of 323 newly reported cases (81.4 per cent) of the year have already received HIV specialist services.

Regarding cases of AIDS, 14 new cases were reported in the fourth quarter, of which eight cases (57.1 per cent) were attributed to homosexual or bisexual contact, and six cases (42.9 per cent) were attributed to heterosexual contact. In this quarter, the most common AIDS-defining illness remained to be Pneumocystis pneumonia. Since 1985, a cumulative total of 2 483 confirmed AIDS cases has been reported in Hong Kong.

Reviewing the latest HIV/AIDS situation in Hong Kong, a spokesman for the CHP said, "The number of reports of HIV infection has decreased for eight consecutive years from the peak of 725 cases in 2015 to 397 cases in 2023, but the rate of decline has moderated visibly last year. Moreover, the number of AIDS cases has escalated from 62 cases in 2022 to 101 cases in 2023, among which over 80 per cent of AIDS patients progressed to AIDS after being diagnosed with HIV infection within three months. This indicates that the majority of people with HIV have not undergone HIV antibody testing early."

"HIV is the cause of AIDS, and sexual transmission remained the major

mode of HIV transmission. Members of the public should use condoms consistently and properly to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV. Those with a history of unsafe sex should take an HIV antibody test early. Key populations with a higher risk of infection should undergo regular HIV screenings, while people who had sex but do not belong to these key populations should consider getting tested at least once. People with HIV should seek specialist care and HIV treatment as soon as possible."

The spokesman noted that a number of community resources are available in enabling members of the public to undergo HIV antibody testing. Members of the public can reserve a free, anonymous and confidential HIV antibody test via the DH's HIV Testing Service website (www.hivtest.gov.hk) or AIDS Hotline (2780 2211). They can also order HIV self-test kits (oral fluid-based and blood-based (fingerprick) testing kits) on the HIV Testing Service website, and collect the self-test kits at various pick-up locations in Hong Kong. In addition, sexual minorities with high-risk behaviours may also seek initial assessment from designated organisations. People having a higher risk of acquiring sexually transmitted illnesses will be referred to The Commons, a one-stop sexual health service for sexual minorities launched by the DH this year, for follow-up. For services of The Commons and information of the designated organisations, please visit www.aids.gov.hk/english/itc/consultation.html.

The spokesman stressed that receiving early HIV treatment with antiretroviral drugs can effectively prevent the progression to AIDS and other complications in people with HIV. Lifelong antiretroviral treatment is indicated for all people with HIV, and the treatment remarkably improves their health and possibility of survival. Moreover, those who are on treatment and achieve sustained viral suppression to an undetectable level with treatment will not transmit the virus through sex, i.e. Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

The public may visit the following pages for more information on HIV/AIDS: the Virtual AIDS Office (www.aids.gov.hk), the Red Ribbon Centre (www.rrc.gov.hk), the HIV Testing Service website (www.hivtest.gov.hk) and the Gay Men HIV Information website (www.21171069.gov.hk).