

CHP reviews local HIV/AIDS situation in second quarter of 2022

A total of 125 cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection were reported to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) in the second quarter of 2022, taking the cumulative total of HIV infections reported locally to 11 442 since 1984.

Of the 125 additional cases, involving 103 males and 22 females, 64 (51.2 per cent) acquired the infection via homosexual or bisexual contact, 27 (21.6 per cent) via heterosexual contact, and one (0.8 per cent) via blood or blood product transfusion outside Hong Kong. The routes of transmission of the remaining 33 cases were yet to be determined due to incomplete information.

The new cases were mainly reported by three major sources: public hospitals, clinics and laboratories (54 cases); social hygiene clinics under the DH (29 cases), and private hospitals, clinics and laboratories (17 cases). Also, 86 of the HIV-infected people (69.9 per cent) have already received HIV specialist services at the DH or the Hospital Authority. A further two cases passed away at the time of reporting.

Twenty-three new cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) were reported in this quarter, of which nine cases (39.1 per cent) were attributed to homosexual or bisexual contact, and 11 cases (47.8 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 2 361 confirmed AIDS cases has been reported in Hong Kong.

Regarding an unusual increase of new HIV infections among female sex workers (FSWs) or females engaging in commercial sex, mostly in Yau Tsim Mong District and Sham Shui Po District, observed since August 2021, which was reported by the CHP last month, the CHP has been actively following up on the surge. Additional fieldwork aiming to provide HIV testing/self-testing and enhance prevention for FSWs and their clients near related venues in the two districts have been arranged. The CHP also made phone calls to known FSWs of Social Hygiene Service and encouraged them to come forward for blood tests since late June. As at August 26, over 3 000 calls were made and more than 900 clients were successfully reached with 135 persons tested. Outreach promotion had reached over 2 000 FSWs in venues with 160 persons tested. No reports of HIV positive results were received. Posters promoting the DH's AIDS hotline/website (www.27802211.com) and the HIV self-testing booking website (dh-hivst.com.hk/en/self-test) were also placed at public places in the two districts as efforts to promote awareness had been continued.

Reviewing the latest HIV/AIDS situation in Hong Kong, a spokesman for the CHP said, "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. HIV is the cause of AIDS. Early HIV treatment with antiretroviral drugs effectively prevents progression to AIDS and other complications. Lifelong antiretroviral treatment is indicated for all people with HIV, and the treatment remarkably improves their health and survival. Moreover, infected people who achieve sustained viral suppression to an undetectable level with treatment 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. Key populations with a higher risk of infection should undergo regular HIV screening. They can visit the DH's AIDS Hotline website or call AIDS Hotline (2780 2211) for a free, anonymous and confidential HIV antibody test, or visit the DH's HIV self-test website to order a free self-test kit. HIV-positive people should seek specialist care and HIV treatment as soon as possible."

Since 2006, the CHP has been regularly conducting community-based HIV prevalence and risk behavioural surveys. The HIV Prevalence and Risk behavioural Survey of Men who have sex with men and Transgenders (PRiSMTG) 2022 survey, which targets both men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender (TG) people, has commenced on June 8 and is expected to last until end-December. MSM and TG people are being recruited via websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, venues serving sexual minorities, and AIDS organisations. Participants will be asked to complete an online questionnaire on an anonymous, confidential and voluntary basis, and submit urine specimens for HIV antibody testing. The CHP appeals to members of the MSM and TG communities to participate in the survey. Details of the survey can be accessed from the designated website (www.prismtg-hk.com).

The public may also 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 AIDS Hotline website (www.27802211.com), the Gay Men HIV Information website (www.21171069.gov.hk) and the HIV self-test website (dh-hivst.com.hk/en/self-test).