

# CHP urges public to be vigilant in preventing acute gastroenteritis

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 8) reminded the public that according to the latest surveillance data, including the number of acute gastroenteritis (AGE) outbreaks as well as data from Accident and Emergency Departments (A&Es) and sentinel residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), there has been a significant increase in AGE activity in Hong Kong recently. Investigation showed that the cause was norovirus. The CHP urged the public to be more vigilant, and to maintain good personal, environmental and food hygiene to minimise the risk of infection.

"There has been a significant increase in the number of patients attending A&Es with AGE symptoms and residents in sentinel RCHEs with vomiting. The number of AGE outbreaks increased sharply from seven recorded in the week ending December 28 last year to 19 in the week ending January 4, with some patient samples tested positive for norovirus in laboratory testing," a CHP spokesman said.

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"In the past two weeks most outbreaks were recorded at RCHEs. The causes include improper handling of vomitus and improper use of bleach for cleaning and disinfection. Besides, some residents of the RCHEs became infected in the community after their vacations, further spreading the infection in the RCHEs," he added.

The CHP has provided infection control advice and training to the affected RCHEs and will keep in close liaison with the RCHEs to monitor the residents' conditions and ensure that the RCHEs have strictly implemented various infection control measures. The DH will also organise a seminar for RCHEs and residential care homes for persons with disabilities to educate their staff on effective measures to prevent AGE outbreaks and provide health advice, such as enhancing personal hygiene and environmental cleaning and disinfection in the RCHEs, as well as appropriate placement of residents with symptoms.

The CHP expects that norovirus activity will remain at a high level during the winter season and the risk of related outbreaks in schools will increase with the resumption of classes after the holidays. The spokesman stressed that norovirus is highly infectious and susceptible individuals can be infected by exposure to even a small amount of norovirus. The virus can be transmitted through various channels such as eating contaminated food, contact with vomitus or faecal matter of infected persons, and contact with contaminated objects, which may lead to a large-scale outbreak. Vomiting in a confined space with suboptimal ventilation poses a potential risk for an outbreak. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to properly and promptly clean up vomitus, and thoroughly disinfect the environment.

The CHP will issue letters to doctors, institutions, schools, kindergartens and child care centres to update them on the latest AGE situation and reminded management of institutions to follow the [Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases](#) on preventive and control measures. In case there are AGE outbreaks, they should report to the CHP as soon as possible for immediate follow up.

Alcohol-based handrub should not substitute hand hygiene with liquid soap and water, as alcohol does not effectively kill some viruses frequently causing AGE, e.g. norovirus. The spokesman also reminded members of the public to take heed of the following preventive measures against gastroenteritis:

- Ensure proper personal hygiene;
- Wash hands thoroughly before handling food and eating, after using the toilet or after changing diapers;
- Wear gloves and wash hands after handling vomitus or faecal matter;
- Clean and disinfect contaminated areas or items promptly and thoroughly with 1:49 diluted household bleach (by adding one part of bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water). Wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Stay home from work or school, and seek medical advice if suffering from vomiting or diarrhea;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Pay attention to food hygiene;
- Use separate utensils to handle raw and cooked food;
- Avoid food that is not thoroughly cooked;
- Drink boiled water; and
- Do not patronise unlicensed food premises or food stalls.

Members of the public may visit the CHP's webpages for more information and preventive advice on [norovirus infection](#).