

DH following up on cluster of infections of disease of temporarily unknown cause in Democratic Republic of Congo

Following reports of a cluster of infections of a disease of temporarily unknown cause in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) said today (December 5) that it had taken the initiative to seek further information from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the DRC health authorities.

According to the information announced by the DRC health authorities, since late October, 79 deaths due to a disease of still unknown cause have been recorded in a district in Kwango province, and more than 300 people have been infected. Most of the patients were aged above 15 and suffered from fever, headache, runny nose, cough, breathing difficulty and anaemia.

"Under the current mechanism, Hong Kong has been equipped with the ability to detect infections of unknown cause and emerging infectious diseases at boundary control points and hospitals. On the immigration level, the DH has been conducting temperature screening for arrivals at all boundary control points. Those who are found to have a fever will be assessed and transferred to public hospitals for medical examination as appropriate. Upon noticing that a disease of temporarily unknown cause in the DRC, the DH has immediately tried to collect the latest information from various channels to conduct risk assessment and formulate appropriate preventive and control measures," a spokesman for the CHP said.

There are currently no direct flights between the DRC and Hong Kong. The CHP has learned from the trade that travellers coming to Hong Kong from the DRC may generally choose transit hubs in Africa to Hong Kong, including Johannesburg in South Africa and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. In light of the disease of temporarily unknown cause in the DRC, the CHP has, as a precautionary measure, immediately stepped up health screenings at the airport for passengers on all flights arriving in Hong Kong from the above-mentioned transit hubs. Port Health staff have been arranged to carry out temperature checks for travellers at the relevant flight gates, conduct medical assessments for symptomatic travellers and refer suspected cases of infections with public health significance to hospitals for medical examination.

"Members of the public who plan to go to the DRC should be vigilant and pay attention to personal and environmental hygiene at all times, and avoid visiting crowded places and having contact with sick persons. Upon returning to Hong Kong, one should seek medical treatment as soon as possible if they

feel unwell and take the initiative to inform their doctors of their relevant travel history," he added.

Since October, the DH has not received any reports of people or travellers arriving in Hong Kong from the DRC suffering from unknown diseases.

"The DH will continue to closely monitor the situation in the DRC and WHO's related information, and take appropriate preventive and control measures based on risk assessment to protect public health," the spokesman said.