

DH raises public awareness on preventing mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B to realise hepatitis B-free generation

To tie in with World Hepatitis Day 2021, the Department of Health (DH) has adopted "Stop mother-to-child transmission to realise a hepatitis B-free generation" as the theme, to promote public awareness on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of hepatitis B.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated July 28 as World Hepatitis Day to raise awareness on hepatitis elimination.

A spokesman for the DH said, "MTCT is the major route of transmission of the hepatitis B virus (HBV). In 2019, about 4 per cent of pregnant women were infected with HBV in Hong Kong. Without any preventive measures, 90 per cent of the babies exposed to HBV would develop chronic hepatitis B infection."

To prevent MTCT of hepatitis B, Hong Kong has implemented universal hepatitis B testing for pregnant women and a universal hepatitis B vaccination programme for children since the 1980s. For babies born to HBV-infected mothers, hepatitis B immunoglobulin will also be administered for extra protection against HBV infection. The coverage for the hepatitis B vaccination programme generally reaches 99 per cent.

The spokesman said, "These measures have resulted in a substantial decline in HBV infection in the younger generation. However, MTCT of hepatitis B may still occur, especially when mothers have a high HBV viral load in their blood."

Therefore, since August 2020, antivirals have been provided for pregnant women with high HBV viral loads to further reduce the risk of MTCT of hepatitis B and achieve a hepatitis B-free generation in Hong Kong.

To meet the goal set by the WHO to eliminate the public health threat posed by viral hepatitis by 2030, the Government launched the Hong Kong Viral Hepatitis Action Plan 2020 – 2024 in October 2020, setting out a comprehensive strategy with specific actions to reduce transmission of viral hepatitis, as well as related morbidity and mortality. Prevention of MTCT of hepatitis B is one of the main focuses of the Action Plan.

The spokesman reminded parents that all newborn babies should complete the three-dose course of hepatitis B vaccination, while mothers with HBV infection should receive appropriate antenatal care and long-term management of their liver condition.

More information about MTCT of hepatitis B is available at the DH's website (www.hepatitis.gov.hk/english/hepatitis_elimination/maternal_transmission_of_hepatitis_b.html).

For information on World Hepatitis Day 2021, please visit the DH's thematic website (www.hepatitis.gov.hk/english/news_activities/world_hepatitis_day.html).