

DH to launch Health Promoting School Programme in coming academic year

The Department of Health (DH) will launch the two-year Health Promoting School (HPS) Programme in 30 primary and secondary schools in the 2019/20 school year, with the aim of fostering a self-sustaining and health-enhancing learning environment for students. Participating schools will be assisted to identify specific health priorities and develop school-based health promotion action plans by making reference to the health needs of their students and work towards the goal of building a healthy campus.

The Consultant Community Medicine (Family and Student Health Services) of the DH, Dr Thomas Chung, announced details of the programme at a press conference today (June 13). He said, "Health Promoting School is an idea promulgated by the World Health Organization (WHO), which aims to strengthen a school's capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working through a concerted effort of all its members and the community.

"Schools serve as an efficient health promotion platform to reach a large number of people. An HPS allows students to acquire knowledge and skills for healthy living which bring life-long benefits. By sharing their learning experiences, students can also enhance the well-being of their families, thus benefiting more people in the community. Meanwhile, making school a healthy workplace can improve the physical and psychosocial health of staff members. Education and health are important and interrelated elements in one's growth. Research suggests that students' levels of physical activity and dietary habits have a strong association with academic achievement, in particular a higher level of physical activity has positive effects on skills in mathematics and reading."

Dr Chung added that according to the WHO's suggestions, the HPS framework covers six key factors, namely healthy school policies, a school's physical environment, a school's social environment, community links, action competencies for healthy living, and school health care and promotion services. Under the six key factors, the HPS Programme will focus on four areas – physical activity, healthy eating, mental health and social well-being.

The HPS Programme will be launched in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years. Based on the six key factors, the DH has developed a checklist for the participating schools to conduct regular self-assessments and review the schools' health promotion measures in a systematic manner. The self-assessments will help the schools set priorities according to their specific circumstances and students' health needs, and develop school-based strategies and action plans on health development.

The HPS team under the DH's Student Health Service will provide support for participating schools to help them attain their goal to build a healthy

campus. Schools will be provided with an overall health status assessment of their students for reference and implementation recommendations will be made on the schools' HPS development in the key areas.

The team will also organise seminars and workshops to help the schools get a better understanding of the concept of HPS and implementation skills. Diversified platforms will be set up for sharing information and tools on HPS and providing professional advice by healthcare professionals.

Dr Chung said, "We hope to gain experience from the participation of the 30 schools and explore the feasibility of extending the HPS framework to the rest of Hong Kong to establish a healthy setting conducive to living, learning and working in school campuses."

At the press conference, Adjunct Associate Professor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion Dr Robin Cheung shared details of the centre's experience in promoting HPS in Hong Kong. He pointed out that evaluation results demonstrated that the implementation of HPS could improve students' health and promote quality school development.

The principals of two schools participating in the HPS Programme also attended the press conference. Caritas St Joseph Secondary School principal Mr Tse Hung-sum said that schools should draw up school-based health promotion strategies based on the characteristics of their schools and needs of their students. He said he believed that through detailed planning and systematic implementation, students' health and the effectiveness of education could be enhanced.

Sharon Lutheran School principal Ms Yum Chuk-kiu said that in this rapidly evolving society, while actively promulgating education work, all stakeholders including students, parents and teachers should pay attention to their health for sustainable development. She said she looked forward to working closely with the DH and collaborating with stakeholders to build a health promoting campus so that the concept of whole-person health can take root in different aspects of school life.

The Government in May last year announced "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Hong Kong" to reduce the burden of NCDs on society, in which the transformation of schools into HPSs was one of the new strategic directions. The Mental Health Review Report announced by the Food and Health Bureau in 2017 also recommended exploring the feasibility of adopting the HPS model in Hong Kong, with a view to building a more caring and supportive environment where school-aged children and adolescents can learn, grow and flourish.

To take forward the idea, the DH set up a Working Group on HPS in May last year to develop a model suitable for local schools by taking reference from local experience of launching healthy schools. The working group comprised representatives from the DH, the Education Bureau and the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion,

as well as school principals and parents.

To learn more about the HPS Programme, please visit www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/hps/hps.html.