

Exercise “Sunstone” tests government response to “Disease X”

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH), in collaboration with other government departments and organisations, today (June 27) held a public health exercise code-named "Sunstone" at a newly built residential building to test the Government's response to a novel disease called "Disease X".

The exercise was aimed at assessing the interoperability of the Government in response to the detection of a novel disease, testing the preparedness of government departments and relevant organisations to respond effectively to a major infectious disease outbreak, as well as validating the interdepartmental procedures and government contingency actions on the ensuing isolation and evacuation of a residential building.

About 150 participants from relevant government departments and organisations took part in the exercise, with 28 experts from the Mainland and Macao health authorities attending as observers. The exercise consisted of two parts. The first part was a table-top exercise conducted on May 24, in which relevant departments and organisations discussed and co-ordinated the communicable disease response measures required in the simulated scenario of detection of a number of cases of "Disease X" in Hong Kong. According to the World Health Organization, "Disease X" represents the knowledge that a communicable disease could be caused by a pathogen currently unknown to cause human disease.

The second part was a ground movement exercise conducted today. Under the exercise simulation, the CHP received the Hospital Authority's report on four suspected cases of "Disease X" who resided in the same residential building. Among them, one patient passed away shortly after admission to the hospital while the remaining three required hospitalisation.

The DH immediately co-ordinated with the relevant government departments and organisations to formulate and implement corresponding measures, and activated the Multi-disciplinary Response Team to conduct investigation and examination of the environmental factors suspected to have contributed to the spread of this disease.

Upon comprehension of the investigation findings, the CHP advised the Director of Health to order the isolation of the affected building and evacuate the residents. The symptomatic residents were conveyed to hospital for isolation whereas those asymptomatic were sent to quarantine centres. Disinfection was carried out subsequently at the affected building, which would remain isolated until the DH confirms that it is safe for lifting the isolation order.

"This exercise provided a valuable platform to test the preparedness of

relevant government departments and organisations to respond effectively to a major infectious disease outbreak. It also enhanced the effectiveness of the response plans for communicable disease and looked for room for improvement, enhancing vigilance to better prepare ourselves for a public health emergency," a spokesman for the DH said.