

## FHB convenes expert meeting on cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, today (January 15) convened an expert meeting to listen to the report by the delegation of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government upon their working visit to Wuhan, Hubei Province with a view to examining surveillance, prevention and control measures adopted in Hong Kong in response to the outbreak of pneumonia cases caused by the novel coronavirus in Wuhan.

The HKSAR Government delegation departed for Wuhan on January 13 to participate in a two-day working visit under the arrangement of the National Health Commission (NHC). They gave an account of the information acquired during the working visit at the expert meeting this morning, including the situation of the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, prevention and control measures as well as clinical management.

Professor Chan said, "The Government has immediately strengthened local prevention and control measures in various aspects since receiving the notification from the NHC on December 31 last year. Measures include enhancing health surveillance measures at all boundary control points and referring suspected cases to public hospitals for isolation and treatment. Furthermore, the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Department of Health (DH) have already alerted healthcare staff to stay vigilant. Furthermore, "Severe Respiratory Disease associated with a Novel Infectious Agent" has been included in Schedule 1 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) as a notifiable infectious disease, with effect from January 8. Any suspected case shall be reported to DH's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) for investigation and follow-up. In light of the newly acquired information, I have, once again, invited local experts to make the latest assessment in order to stay alert, get well-prepared and make prompt responses when necessary."

The HKSAR Government delegation took part in a working seminar arranged by the Hubei Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention to learn more about the prevention and control of the pneumonia cases infected with the novel coronavirus, and exchange views with the experts at national, provincial and municipal levels. Moreover, they had been to the BSL-3 laboratory of the Hubei Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention to understand the laboratory's work of emergency response, disease surveillance and scientific research.

They also visited the Wuhan Jinyintan Hospital in Wuhan to have face-to-face communication with the experts at national, provincial and municipal levels responsible for prevention and control of the outbreak as well as patients' treatment. It is the designated hospital for medical treatment of public health emergencies as well as for intensive treatment and isolation of patients of the pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province.

The visit was fruitful in various aspects. In addition to better understanding of the course of identification, detection, prevention and control as well as contact tracing, the delegation also obtained further information of epidemiological investigation of the 41 confirmed pneumonia cases infected with the novel coronavirus. The information is useful in enhancing local surveillance. With regard to clinical management, they have a better understanding of the symptoms, risk factors, co-infection, laboratory tests, treatment and infection control measures, etc. of this viral pneumonia.

"The HKSAR Government would like to express sincere gratitude to the NHC as well as relevant authorities in the Hubei Province and Wuhan. The working visit has significantly enhanced our understanding on the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, which would support the implementation of better prevention and control measures in Hong Kong," Professor Chan said.

Moreover, the Mainland had earlier successfully isolated the virus and shared with the World Health Organization the gene sequences. The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch under DH's CHP is developing specific tests based on the information of the gene sequences.

Upon grasping further information at the meeting, the experts unanimously agreed that the surveillance, response, prevention and control measures adopted by the HKSAR Government is in the right direction. The Mainland authority has announced the latest investigation results, which showed that no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission had been identified so far. But the possibility of limited human-to-human transmission could not be ruled out. In this connection, Hong Kong should continue to remain highly vigilant, stay alert and continue to monitor the latest development in order to step up prevention and control measures. Various departments should continue to adopt various prevention and control measures under the Serious Response Level of the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance, in a bid to reduce the public health risk and safeguard public health.

The members of the HKSAR Government delegation are the Under Secretary for Food and Health, Dr Chui Tak-yi; the Head of Communicable Disease Branch of the DH's CHP, Dr Chuang Shuk-kwan, and the Chief Infection Control Officer of the HA, Dr Raymond Lai.

#### Designated webpage

A dedicated webpage ([www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html](http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html)) has been set up by the CHP to provide relevant information and health advice. To address the public's concern, the CHP will announce the details of cases fulfilling the reporting criteria ([www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/enhanced\\_sur\\_pneumonia\\_wuhan\\_eng.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/enhanced_sur_pneumonia_wuhan_eng.pdf)) on the above webpage daily to enhance transparency.

#### Health advice

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the

public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes; after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs; or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and add water to the U-traps regularly to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

#### Travel advice

The public should take heed of the health advice below when travelling outside Hong Kong:

- avoid touching animals (including game), poultry/birds or their droppings;
- avoid visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms;
- avoid making close contact with patients, especially those with symptoms of acute respiratory infections;
- do not consume game meat and do not patronise food premises where game meat is served;
- adhere to food safety and hygiene rules such as avoiding consuming raw or undercooked animal products, including milk, eggs and meat, or foods which may be contaminated by animal secretions, excretions (such as urine) or contaminated products, unless they have been properly cooked, washed or peeled;
- if feeling unwell when outside Hong Kong, especially if having a fever or cough, wear a surgical mask, inform the hotel staff or tour escort and seek medical advice at once; and
- after returning to Hong Kong, consult a doctor promptly if having a fever or other symptoms, take the initiative to inform the doctor of recent travel history and any exposure to animals, and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease.