

Government announces early Lunar New Year holidays for kindergartens and child care centres

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, today (January 24) chaired an inter-departmental meeting to review the latest situation of seasonal influenza and assess the need to strengthen control measures. Representatives from the Education Bureau (EDB), the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Department of Health, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Hospital Authority participated in the meeting.

During the inter-departmental meeting, the attendees reviewed the latest local influenza situation and noted that the outbreak of influenza-like illness (ILI) in kindergartens and child care centres had reached a very high intensity level and the influenza-associated hospitalisation rate among children aged less than six years in this season had reached a high intensity level. Furthermore, the number of paediatric influenza-associated severe complications and the ILI attendance rate of children aged between 0 and 5 at Accident and Emergency Departments were higher than those of last year. In addition, the overall occupancy rate of paediatric wards of public hospitals in the past week ranged from 90 to 100 percent.

After considering a number of factors including the latest surveillance figures and trend, the pressure on healthcare services provided by public hospitals, the concern of the society and parents as well as the approaching Lunar New Year, the Government announced that all kindergartens and child care centres will start their Lunar New Year holidays early on January 26 (Saturday) until the end of their originally scheduled Lunar New Year holidays.

The attendees of the inter-departmental meeting agreed that the additional mitigation measure in relation to kindergartens and child care centres could reduce the chance of transmission of influenza among children in school settings as well as the risk of acquiring influenza infection, and also indirectly relieve the pressure on demand for healthcare services provided by public hospitals.

EDB and SWD will inform kindergartens and child care centres about the detailed arrangement for advancing the Lunar New Year holidays.

Besides receiving seasonal influenza vaccination as early as possible for personal protection, the following measures are advised to prevent influenza and respiratory tract infections:

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;

- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70-80 per cent alcohol-based handrub as an effective alternative;
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin;
- Put on a surgical mask when respiratory symptoms develop;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When influenza is prevalent, avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places; high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks in such places; and
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

For the latest information on influenza activity, please visit the Centre for Health Protection (CHP)'s [influenza page](#) and weekly [Flu Express](#). As for vaccination, the public may call the CHP's hotline at 2125 2125 or visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#).