

Government closely monitors situation of respiratory tract infection

A spokesman for the Department of Health (DH) today (December 4) said that, as it is expected to have more respiratory tract infections in winter including seasonal influenza as the temperature drops, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH will continue to closely monitor the situation in the local community through its regular surveillance mechanism. Members of the public, especially high-risk groups, should receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) and COVID-19 vaccines at appropriate times for enhanced personal protection.

The CHP has all along been closely monitoring the activity of respiratory pathogens locally through different channels such as laboratory testing, hospital admission, disease outbreak reports, etc. Surveillance data in the past four weeks (as of November 25) revealed that the rhinovirus/enterovirus has the highest activity level among the local respiratory tract pathogens, accounting for about 10 per cent of the respiratory specimens testing positive received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch and the Hospital Authority (HA), though maintaining at a steady level. The next active pathogens are parainfluenza viruses and adenovirus, with the latest positive percentage of 5.2 per cent and 4.4 per cent respectively and are on a rising trend, which are in line with corresponding seasonal trends before the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, according to the figures from the HA, the number of paediatric admission to public hospitals involving *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection in the past three months hovered 110 to 170 each month. The figures are higher than 50 plus cases in August, but the trend remains largely stable. Other than that, the local seasonal influenza and COVID-19 activities continue to maintain at a low level. There is also no recent increase in the number of outbreaks involving respiratory tract infections reported.

As many respiratory pathogens including influenza virus may have increasing activity and community transmission during winter, while vaccination is safe and effective in preventing seasonal influenza and COVID-19, the DH strongly urged members of the public, especially high-risk groups, to receive SIV as soon as possible, and high-risk groups (regardless of the number of doses received previously) should receive a booster dose to be given at least six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later).

The spokesman said that mask wearing can effectively reduce the risk of viral infection and transmission. The CHP has all along suggested the following persons to wear masks:

1. any persons with fever or respiratory symptoms;
2. any persons who are visiting or working in high-risk places such as residential care homes (RCHs) for the elderly, RCHs for persons with

- disabilities, and clinical areas of healthcare facilities; and
3. high-risk persons (e.g. persons with underlying medical conditions or persons who are immunocompromised) who are going to crowded places such as public transport, etc.

Moreover, as both influenza and COVID-19 may cause more serious complications to the weak and frail or elderly people, the CHP has updated the [guidelines](#) targeting RCHs for the elderly and RCHs for persons with disabilities on November 27 to remind them again to maintain good personal and environmental hygiene at all times, while staff and visitors should continue to wear well-fitted surgical masks while working or visiting RCHs. The CHP also conducted briefing sessions with the Social Welfare Department to staff at RCHs, reiterating the importance of getting vaccination and wearing masks, with a view to enhancing the infection control and lowering the transmission risk of influenza and COVID-19 at RCHs.

"To prevent respiratory infections, members of the public should observe strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene at all times. Persons with respiratory symptoms, even if the symptoms are mild, should wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly. They should perform hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask," the spokesman stressed.

For the latest information, please visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#). As for vaccination, the public may visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#).