

Government convenes Steering Committee meeting to prevent novel infectious disease (with photo)

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, today (January 16) convened the second Steering Committee meeting in accordance with the Serious Response Level under the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance (the Preparedness and Response Plan). In response to the information acquired by the delegation of the Hong Kong Government upon their working visit in Wuhan and the latest development relating to pneumonia cases with the novel coronavirus, the meeting assessed the risk and reviewed the prevention and control measures with a view to getting prepared to cope with the latest challenge in public health.

Professor Chan said, "Currently, no severe pneumonia case infected with the novel coronavirus has been detected in Hong Kong. The latest investigation results announced by the Mainland authority showed that no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission had been identified so far. However, the possibility of limited human-to-human transmission could not be ruled out. We note that confirmed pneumonia cases infected by novel coronavirus have been detected in other countries. In view of great volume of passenger flow in Hong Kong, the Government has to respond quickly in case there is relevant imported case. Therefore, at the meeting, I have reminded various departments to be well prepared."

At the Steering Committee meeting, representatives of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA) reported the latest situation, risk assessment and the actions taken, while the representatives of the other bureaux and departments also reported the progress of various prevention and control measures adopted under the Preparedness and Response Plan.

Professor Chan said, "During the Lunar New Year Spring Festival travel seasons, a large volume of incoming and outgoing visitors is expected. Moreover, we are now in the influenza season. These increase the risk of importing and spreading the disease in the community. In view of the latest situation, the DH has expanded the scope of surveillance and will inform the relevant stakeholders by letters. In addition to enhancing port health surveillance and the cleaning of public facilities, relevant government departments will remind the tourism and hotel sectors to adopt measures recommended by the DH to prevent infectious diseases. Also, we urge universities to step up prevention and control measures at their campuses and hostels and take heed of health condition of those students who have visited the Mainland."

"Regarding publicity and public education, various departments agreed to

emphasise the following three points to members of the public: (1) 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; (2) clean hands before wearing masks; and (3) maintain drainage pipes properly and add water to the U-traps regularly to ensure environmental hygiene," she said.

Policy bureaux, government departments and organisations attending the Steering Committee meeting included the Transport and Housing Bureau, the Security Bureau, the Environment Bureau, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, the Education Bureau (EDB), the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Development Bureau, the Administration Wing of the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, the DH, the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), the Information Services Department (ISD), the Home Affairs Department (HAD), the Tourism Commission, the Water Supplies Department, the Transport Department (TD), the Highways Department, the Civil Engineering and Development Department, the Architectural Services Department, the Drainage Services Department, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, the Lands Department, the Hong Kong Observatory, the Government Property Agency, the Government Logistics Department, the University Grants Committee Secretariat and the Hospital Authority (HA).

Various departments have enhanced prevention and control measures according to the Preparedness and Response Plan and their own contingency plan, which include:

Stepping up surveillance and risk communication

- DH has sent letters to all private hospitals, doctors and Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong, reminding them to pay special attention and refer suspected cases that fall within the widened scope of surveillance.
- HA has reminded frontline healthcare staff including those working in the 18 Chinese Medicine Centres for Training and Research to pay special attention to clinical information of suspected pneumonia patients, including those who had visited Wuhan within 14 days prior to the onset of the illness. More stringent infection control measures are enforced in public hospitals in accordance with the Serious Response Level.
- DH and HA are announcing the number of local cases falling within the scope of enhanced surveillance and related information on a daily basis to increase transparency.

Strengthening port health measures and cleansing

- The MTR Corporation Limited, the Airport Authority, and the relevant airlines have enhanced cleaning and disinfection measures of the incoming express trains and planes from Wuhan as well as the cleaning of West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) and Airport Terminal Building.
- Further strengthen port health measures. Additional thermal imaging systems

were put in place in the Hong Kong International Airport and Hong Kong West Kowloon Station of the XRL for checking body temperature of travellers with increased frequency of random checking.

- Enhance dissemination of health messages through broadcast to travellers arriving by flight/XRL, distribution of leaflets, promulgating travel health news on website and using posters.
- FEHD is conducting a territory-wide year-end clean-up campaign between December 31, 2019 and January 20, 2020. During the campaign, the FEHD will step up the cleaning of public facilities under the department's management including public markets, cooked food centres, hawker bazaars, public toilets and refuse collection points. FEHD also disseminates information to the trade associations of the food industry, and reminds operators of food premises to keep their premises and equipment clean as well as to maintain hygiene practices in handling food. Holders of hawker stalls are also urged to clean up their stalls thoroughly. To maintain hygiene of public places, FEHD will also strengthen enforcement by taking enforcement action against people committing offences in relation to public cleanliness.

Publicity and public education

- CHP has set up a dedicated webpage (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html) to provide relevant information and health advice.
- EDB has disseminated information to schools on preventing the spread of the infectious disease in the premises.
- SWD has disseminated information to child care centres, residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities, drug treatment and rehabilitation centres as well as service units subsidised by the SWD on preventing the spread of the infectious disease in the centres.
- The Housing Department has conducted regular cleaning of public areas of public rental housing blocks, encouraged residents to maintain good hygiene practices and taken enforcement action against hygiene offences.
- The Labour Department has disseminated information to employers, employees and associations on preventing the spread of the infectious disease in the workplace.
- TD has disseminated information to the transport sector on preventing the spread of the infectious disease on public transport.
- HAD has disseminated information to hotels, guesthouses, property management companies, owners' corporations and mutual aid committees through District Offices and the relevant network on the infectious disease prevention measures.
- FEHD has carried out regular inspection to ensure that operators of licensed food premises keep their premises and equipment clean, and maintain hygiene practices in handling food. FEHD will also take enforcement action against people who cause environmental hygiene problems in public places by littering, spitting and other unhygienic practices. The Centre for Food Safety has also stepped up publicity through various channels to remind the public not to bring raw game, meat, poultry or eggs (except fully cooked eggs) without health certificates into Hong Kong.
- LCSD has disseminated information to its staff on preventing the spread of novel infectious disease in LCSD venues such as parks and playgrounds as well as stepped up relevant cleansing operations and enforcement action against

littering in LCSD venues.

- ISD and DH produced a new set of TV and radio Announcements in the Public Interest and two posters to remind members of the public of the travel and health advice on the prevention of the spread of novel infectious disease.

Designated webpage

A dedicated webpage (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) 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.

