

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

In light of the cluster of viral pneumonia cases with unknown cause detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, today (January 6) convened the 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), to discuss the latest situation as well as prevention and control measures with various relevant policy bureaux and government departments in a bid to safeguard public health.

Chairing the meeting, Professor Chan said, "Currently, no serious pneumonia case related to Wuhan has been detected in Hong Kong, but the cluster of viral pneumonia cases in Wuhan can be regarded as a 'Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance'. Upon risk assessment, the Government officially activated the Serious Response Level, the second tier of the three-tier response level system, on January 4 and implemented the corresponding measures under this response level. In response to the increasing number of the cluster of pneumonia cases detected in Wuhan and the latest situation, relevant departments should remain on high vigilance and further enhance prevention measures. Under the Serious Response Level, the immediate health impact caused by 'Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance' on local population is moderate.

"The Government will keep in view the risk assessment and recommendations made by the World Health Organization, and continue to maintain close liaison with the National Health Commission. The Government will also closely monitor the latest situation of the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan and update the surveillance criteria and testing strategies accordingly."

At the Steering Committee meeting, amongst others, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) briefed the participants on the latest information of the cluster of pneumonia cases detected in Wuhan. Members of the public are urged to maintain strict personal, food and environmental hygiene both locally and during travel.

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 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, 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 and the Hospital Authority (HA).

"Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance" refers to any infectious disease caused by a pathogen unknown to cause human disease before, but may have changed its property to cause human infection with or without the ability of efficient human-to-human transmission. The disease has the potential to lead to international spread and public health emergency.

Prevention and control measures

Various departments have enhanced prevention and control measures according to the Preparedness and Response 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, i.e. patients with fever and acute respiratory symptoms, or pneumonia symptoms; and who had visited Wuhan within 14 days prior to the onset of the illness.
- 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, 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 above-mentioned scope of enhanced surveillance and related information on a daily basis to increase transparency;
- Amendment to the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) is underway in full swing to include severe respiratory disease associated with a novel infectious agent as a statutorily notifiable infectious disease. It is expected to be gazetted within this week.

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. Fever patients with acute respiratory symptoms who had visited Wuhan within 14 days prior to the onset of the illness will be immediately referred to public hospitals for isolation, treatment and follow-up.
- 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.
- Housing Department (HD) 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 service vehicles and ferries.
- 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.
- LCSD has disseminated information to staff of all districts and sections 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.

Prevention of pneumonia and respiratory tract infection

Members of the public should 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 secretion after coughing or sneezing.
- 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 or hand dryer. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, 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.

- 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.

Health advices when travelling outside Hong Kong

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 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.
- after returning to Hong Kong, consult a doctor promptly if having a fever or other symptoms, inform the doctor of recent travel history and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease.

