

Government enhances surveillance on novel coronavirus infection (with photo)

The Government today (February 18) announced that the "Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme" by the Hospital Authority (HA) would be expanded from tomorrow (February 19) to cover the patients attending the General Out-patient Clinics (GOPCs) as well as Accident and Emergency Departments (AEDs), with a view to further enhancing the current surveillance, prevention and control strategy in Hong Kong.

On a trial basis, the HA will arrange testing on deep throat saliva specimen for outpatients attending GOPCs and AEDs with fever and respiratory symptoms, and without epidemiological links with confirmed cases of novel coronavirus infection. Infection control advice will be given to outpatients awaiting test result.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) said, "After reviewing the measures in light of the latest situation of novel coronavirus infection in Hong Kong, the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Infection Control under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) also recommended that the enhanced surveillance be expanded from inpatient to outpatient settings. We believe that the aforesaid measure helps detect mild cases in the community and provide a better understanding of the epidemiological situation."

Under the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance, the FHB, the DH and the HA have taken into account risk assessment and the development of the disease to expand the "Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance" programme in phases. The scheme was implemented in mid-January to conduct tests for novel coronavirus infection on pneumonia patients meeting the relevant criteria, and has been further expanded in late January to cover all in-patient pneumonia cases.

The FHB, the DH and the HA will continue to closely monitor the latest development of the disease.

