

Government holds inter-departmental meeting on cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan (with photo)

The Government today (January 2) held an inter-departmental meeting to examine the prevention measures adopted in response to the cluster of pneumonia cases detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province and to remind all relevant departments to heighten their vigilance and be well-prepared.

Chairing the meeting, the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, noted that although no serious pneumonia case related to those in Wuhan has been detected in Hong Kong so far, the purpose of today's meeting is to let all relevant policy bureaux and government departments be well-prepared and make necessary arrangements. The Government will stay alert with a view to ensuring necessary measures be put in place as soon as possible whenever necessary.

Professor Chan said that the Government had strengthened prevention and control measures in many aspects including enhancing health surveillance measures at all boundary control points, referring suspected cases to public hospitals for isolation and treatment. Also, the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Department of Health (DH) have already informed healthcare staff to stay alert.

Policy bureaux, government departments and organisations attending today's meeting included the Education Bureau, the Transport and Housing Bureau, the Security Bureau, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, the DH, the HA, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Home Affairs Department, the Information Services Department, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Social Welfare Department and the Tourism Commission.

Measures that have already been taken by various departments include:

Surveillance, prevention and control measures

- already put in place surveillance, prevention and control measures, and remain vigilant and work closely with the World Health Organization and relevant health authorities to monitor the latest development;
- closely monitor the latest situation of the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan and update the surveillance criteria and testing strategies accordingly;
- to address public concern and to increase transparency, the Government will daily announce the number of cases meeting enhanced surveillance;
- strengthen port health measures. From January 3 onwards, additional

thermal imaging systems will be put in place in the Hong Kong International Airport for checking body temperature of inbound travellers from Wuhan. For all boundary control points including Hong Kong West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, fever patients with acute respiratory symptoms who had visited wet markets or seafood markets in Wuhan 14 days prior to the onset of the illness will be immediately referred to public hospitals for isolation, treatment and follow-up. The MTR Corporation Limited, the Airport Authority, and the relevant airlines have been advised to enhance cleaning and disinfection measures of the incoming express trains and planes from Wuhan;

- inform the HA about the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan;
- send letters to daytime service units of institutions and schools, urging them to strengthen personal and environmental hygiene measures;
- strengthen the cleaning and maintain environmental hygiene of public facilities under the purview of all government departments; and
- remind travellers to wear surgical masks and seek medical attention if they present with respiratory symptoms, and reveal their travel history to doctors.

Alerting healthcare staff

- 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 the presentation of fever and acute respiratory illness, or pneumonia symptoms, who have visited wet markets and seafood markets in Wuhan 14 days prior to the onset of illness;
- send letters to all doctors and private hospitals including Chinese medicine practitioners, reminding them to pay attention and referred suspected case;
- if a suspected case is identified, frontline healthcare staff should send the patient to airborne infection isolation room for treatment with urgent laboratory investigation; and to inform the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH and the headquarters of HA; and
- keep close communication with the CHP of the DH to monitor the development of the situation.

Travel advice

The public should take heed of the preventive measures below when travelling outside Hong Kong:

- avoid touching 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;
- 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, inform the doctor of recent travel history and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease.

Health advice

To prevent 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; 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.

