

Government urges public to continue to stay vigilant against monkeypox

The Government said today (July 24) that it will continue to closely monitor the situation and take appropriate preventive measures following the decision of the World Health Organization (WHO) to regard the multi-country/place monkeypox outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

Since the beginning of 2022 to July 20, more than 14 500 suspected and confirmed cases have been reported across 72 countries/places from all six WHO regions, a clear rise from the about 3 040 cases reported from 47 countries/places at the beginning of May this year. Most of these cases involved men who have sex with men.

To date Hong Kong has not recorded any suspected or confirmed monkeypox human infection case. To prepare for any outbreak and to step up preventive and control measures, the Government has amended the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) and the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A) to include monkeypox as a statutorily notifiable disease. It has also published the Preparedness and Response Plan for Monkeypox in early June and stepped up publicity and public education on monkeypox.

"The Government will consider the recommendations of the WHO and step up disease monitoring, prevention and health promotion efforts. We are also actively liaising with the respective manufacturer of smallpox vaccine approved by overseas drug regulatory authority for use in the prevention of monkeypox, enquiring on and discussing the details of supplying the vaccines to Hong Kong as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will inform all doctors, public and private hospitals of the WHO's latest decision and advice," said the Government spokesman.

"We urge the public to take precautions and avoid close physical contact with persons or animals suspected of contracting monkeypox. They should seek medical attention as soon as possible if they experience symptoms of monkeypox, including fever, severe headache, muscle pain, swollen lymph node, mouth lesion and rash. Following the latest advice from the WHO, persons suspected to have contracted monkeypox should avoid undertaking any travel," the spokesman added.

To reduce the risk of infection, members of the public who need to travel to places affected by monkeypox should:

- (a) avoid physical contact with sick persons or animals;
- (b) wear protective clothing and equipment including gloves and surgical masks when taking care of sick persons or handling animals, and wash hands after these procedures;

(c) thoroughly cook all animal products before eating; and

(d) seek medical advice promptly in case of any suspicious symptoms.

The Government will continue to assess the risk in view of the latest scientific evidence and situation and implement corresponding measures.