

Grave sweepers urged to take preventive measures against vector-borne diseases during Ching Ming Festival

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (March 29) reminded the public to take measures to avoid stings or bites by mosquitoes, mites and ticks, and accumulation of stagnant water during the coming Ching Ming Festival.

There are many mosquito-borne diseases, including dengue fever (DF), chikungunya fever, Japanese encephalitis (JE), malaria, yellow fever and Zika virus infection. These diseases are endemic in many overseas countries. In recent years, local cases of DF and JE have been recorded in Hong Kong.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Regarding DF, a record high of 29 local cases were confirmed last year. The public are reminded that eliminating breeding sites for mosquitoes and avoiding mosquito bites are key to preventing DF. With possibly more outdoor exposure while visiting cemeteries and columbaria, grave sweepers should wear loose, light-coloured and long-sleeved tops and trousers and use DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed parts of the body and clothing. Remove stagnant water in incense burners and used containers and clear rubbish before leaving to prevent mosquito breeding. Anti-mosquito measures are essential in guarding against mosquito-borne diseases such as DF and JE."

In addition, members of the public who intend to travel during Ching Ming Festival holidays should stay alert to the DF situation and that of other mosquito-borne diseases in their destinations and carry out anti-mosquito measures as necessary.

Regarding the latest DF situation in Hong Kong, as of yesterday (March 28), the CHP had recorded a total of 31 confirmed cases in 2019, all of which were imported cases. The cases were mainly imported from Indonesia (seven), Malaysia (seven) and Thailand (six).

DF remains endemic in some areas in Asia and beyond. In Guangdong, there were 52 cases in the first two months of this year. The latest figures for 2019 revealed that 12 545 cases had been recorded in Thailand, 2 195 in Singapore (since December 31, 2018) and 61 in Japan. In the Americas, the latest figures indicated that 185 934 and 8 090 cases were filed in Brazil and Mexico respectively in 2019.

The public should take heed of the following advice on mosquito control:

- Thoroughly check all gully traps, roof gutters, surface channels and

drains to prevent blockage;

- Scrub and clean drains and surface channels with an alkaline detergent compound at least once a week to remove any deposited mosquito eggs;
- Properly dispose of refuse, such as soft drink cans, empty bottles and boxes, in covered litter containers;
- Completely change the water of flowers and plants at least once a week. The use of saucers should be avoided if possible;
- Level irregular ground surfaces before the rainy season;
- Avoid staying in shrubby areas; and
- Take personal protective measures such as wearing loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or exposed parts of the body when doing outdoor activities.

To reduce the risk of infections spread by mosquitoes, apart from [general measures](#), travellers returning from areas affected by DF and Zika virus infection should apply insect repellent for 14 days or at least 21 days respectively upon arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor. DEET-containing insect repellents are effective and the public should take heed of the tips below:

- Read carefully the label instructions first;
- Apply right before entering an area with risk of mosquito bites;
- Apply on exposed skin and clothing;
- Use DEET of up to 30 per cent for pregnant women and up to 10 per cent for children*;
- Apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent; and
- Re-apply only when needed and follow the instructions.

• For children who travel to countries or areas where mosquito-borne diseases are endemic or epidemic and where exposure is likely, those aged 2 months or above can use DEET-containing insect repellents with a concentration of DEET up to 30 per cent.

When members of the public go to scrubby areas, they are advised to take additional preventive measures against vector-borne diseases:

- Wear shoes that cover the entire foot; avoid wearing sandals or open shoes;
- Tuck trousers into socks or boots to prevent arthropods from reaching the skin;
- Stay on footpaths and avoid walking through vegetation. Do not brush along the vegetation at the sides of footpaths;
- Avoid resting on vegetation, or at humid and dark places;
- Do not hang clothing on vegetation;
- Do not feed wild or stray animals;
- After the visit, inspect body parts and clothing for attached ticks; and
- If an attached tick is found on the body, gently remove it by grasping

its head with tweezers or fine-tipped forceps close to the skin, then disinfect the bite area and wash hands with soap and water.

The public may refer to the CHP's pages on [vector-borne diseases](#) and [tips for using insect repellents](#) for details.