

HA enhanced laboratory surveillance programme extends to outpatients with mild symptoms

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) today (February 18) announced the further extension of the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme to further advance the identification of novel coronavirus infected patients to minimise the risk of community transmission.

"To combat the novel coronavirus epidemic, the HA has widened the coverage of the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme several times in the past so as to identify more cases as early as possible," the HA spokesperson said.

"The current Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme covers all inpatient pneumonia cases. Around 700 to 800 tests are being conducted each day in all public hospitals. Around 20 cases which have no travel nor contact history with confirmed cases have been identified through the Programme, which is about one-third of the confirmed cases."

The spokesperson said that there were increasing number of cases in the community and some patients presented with mild symptoms only. Many patients were diagnosed as common upper respiratory infections until their conditions deteriorated.

"After prudent consideration of the current capacity of isolation facilities in public hospitals, the HA decided to dovetail with the recommendations of the Scientific Committees of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) to extend the surveillance to outpatients. This will help detect mild cases in the community and to have a better understanding of the epidemiological situation."

Starting from tomorrow (February 19), Accident and Emergency Department (AED) or General Out-patient Clinic (GOPC) patients aged 18 or above, presented with fever and respiratory symptoms or mild chest infection, will be given a specimen bottle for the collection of deep throat saliva in the early morning of the following day, if hospital admission is considered unnecessary according to clinical assessment. Patients are required to return the specimens to the AED or GOPC for novel coronavirus laboratory testing.

"The HA will send the specimen to the Public Health Laboratory Centre (PHLC) of the Department of Health (DH). Patients do not need to stay in hospital to wait for test result. The HA will inform the patient via SMS if the test result is negative to novel coronavirus while the CHP will contact

the patient for hospital admission for isolation and other follow-up if the test result is positive."

Under the current containment strategy to manage the epidemic, 17 AEDs and over 50 GOPCs of the HA will launch this trial programme in the coming week with a view to advance the detection of infected patients and to minimise the risk of community outbreak.

"Data collected from the Programme can help ascertain the proportion of infected patients in the community and support the upcoming epidemic management strategy formulation," the spokesperson added.

The HA and CHP will closely monitor the implementation and the outcome of the Programme to make adjustments as required.