

Heightened vigilance urged amid increase in acute gastroenteritis activity

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (June 21) called on members of the public to heighten vigilance against acute gastroenteritis (AGE), as the local activity of AGE has been increasing recently.

According to the CHP's latest surveillance data, the number of institutional AGE outbreaks increased in the past few weeks, from nine in the week ending June 3, to 17 (affecting 130 persons) last week (ending June 17). As of yesterday (June 20), 13 outbreaks (affecting 124 persons) had been reported in the past three days of this week. From the week ending June 3 to yesterday, the majority of the outbreaks occurred in child care centres or kindergartens, and at least 13 outbreaks (affecting 232 persons) were confirmed to be related to norovirus during the above-mentioned period. The CHP's epidemiological investigations revealed that the above AGE outbreaks had a higher chance of being caused by person-to-person transmission or environmental contamination, and the CHP has ruled out that the outbreaks involved food poisoning.

AGEs are usually caused by viruses, most commonly norovirus, rotavirus, and adenovirus, and occur more frequently in winter. The modes of transmission include contact with vomitus or faeces from infected persons, contact with contaminated environments or objects, and aerosol spread with contaminated droplets of splashed vomitus.

To prevent AGE outbreaks, strict personal, food and environmental hygiene, with particular attention to handling of vomitus and faecal matter, are very important. A spokesman for the CHP reminded that alcohol-based handrub should not substitute hand hygiene with liquid soap and water, as alcohol does not effectively kill some viruses frequently causing AGE, for example, norovirus. Members of the public are advised to take heed of the following preventive measures against gastroenteritis:

- Ensure proper personal hygiene;
- Wash hands thoroughly before handling food and eating, after using the toilet or after changing diapers;
- Wear gloves and a surgical mask while disposing of or handling vomitus and faeces, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Clean and disinfect contaminated areas or items promptly and thoroughly with diluted household bleach (by adding one part of bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water). Wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Ensure the household bleach used has not expired. For effective

disinfection, diluted bleach should be used within 24 hours after preparation as effectiveness would decrease with time if left unused;

- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Pay attention to food hygiene;
- Use separate utensils to handle raw and cooked food;
- Avoid food that is not thoroughly cooked;
- Drink boiled water; and
- Refrain from work or attending school, and seek medical advice if suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea.

The spokesman reminded management of schools and institutions to follow the [Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases](#) on preventive and control measures as well as management of outbreaks, which should be reported to the CHP for prompt follow-up.

The public may visit the CHP's pages on [acute diarrhoeal diseases](#) and [norovirus infection](#) for more information.