

Heightened vigilance urged amid increase in local hand, foot and mouth disease and acute gastroenteritis activity

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (September 25) called on members of the public to heighten vigilance against hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) and acute gastroenteritis (AGE), as the local activities of HFMD and AGE have been increasing recently.

"Members of the public and management of institutions are urged to maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene. The CHP will issue letters to doctors, hospitals, child care centres, kindergartens and schools and institutions to draw their attention to the latest situation," a spokesman for the CHP said.

A. Hand, foot and mouth disease

The local activity of HFMD has increased after the start of the new school year. The number of institutional HFMD outbreaks increased significantly in the past two weeks, from 24 (affecting 112 persons) in the week ending September 14 to 42 (affecting 183 persons) last week. As of yesterday (September 24), 35 outbreaks (affecting 97 persons) had already been recorded in the first three days this week. In the past four weeks, child care centres and kindergartens reported most outbreaks (64 per cent).

Surveillance of HFMD based at sentinel child care centres/kindergartens showed that its activity remained at a high level. In addition, AED Syndromic Surveillance also showed that the activity of HFMD was still at a high level.

For enterovirus (EV) 71 infection and severe paediatric enterovirus infection (other than EV71 and poliovirus), as of yesterday, a total of five and eight cases had been recorded this year respectively.

"In Hong Kong, HFMD occurs throughout the year. While the disease activity is usually higher from May to July, a smaller peak may also occur from October to December. Schools, institutions and play facilities should observe our guidelines and health advice against outbreaks to better protect young children who are more prone to infections," the spokesman added.

The latest local situation of HFMD and EV 71 infection is published on every Friday in [EV Scan](#) at the CHP website.

To prevent HFMD, members of the public, and especially the management of institutions, should take heed of the following preventive measures:

- Maintain good air circulation;
- Wash hands before meals and after going to the toilet or handling diapers or other stool-soiled materials;
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly, especially when they are dirtied by respiratory secretions, such as after sneezing;
- Cover the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and oral discharges properly;
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as furniture, toys and commonly shared items with 1:99 diluted household bleach (mixing one part of bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite with 99 parts of water), leave for 15 to 30 minutes, and then rinse with water and keep dry. For metallic surfaces, disinfect with 70 per cent alcohol;
- Use absorbent disposable towels to wipe away obvious contaminants such as respiratory secretions, vomitus or excreta, and then disinfect the surface and neighbouring areas with 1:49 diluted household bleach (mixing one part of bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite with 49 parts of water), leave for 15 to 30 minutes and then rinse with water and keep dry. For metallic surfaces, disinfect with 70 per cent alcohol;
- Children who are ill should be kept out of school until their fever and rash have subsided and all the vesicles have dried and crusted;
- Avoid going to overcrowded places; and
- Parents should maintain close communication with schools to let them know the latest situation of the sick children.

B. Acute gastroenteritis

The CHP's latest surveillance data also showed an increase in the number of institutional AGE outbreaks in the past few weeks, from two (affecting 26 persons) in the week ending September 7 to seven (affecting 77 persons) last week. In the last four weeks, most outbreaks occurred in child care centres and kindergartens (59 per cent).

As of yesterday (September 24), no institutional AGE outbreaks were recorded in the first three days this week.

"In Hong Kong, AGE occurs throughout the year, but is known to occur more frequently in winter. Schools and institutions are reminded 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 spokesman noted.

The spokesman advised members of the public 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 when disposing of vomitus or faecal matter, and wash hands

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;
- 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
- Do not patronise unlicensed food premises or food stalls.

The public may visit the CHP's pages on [HFMD and EV71 infection](#), [acute diarrhoeal diseases](#) and [norovirus infection](#) for more information.