

Heightened vigilance urged amid increasing activity of hand, foot and mouth disease

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (September 27) urged the public to maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene as the local prevalence of hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) has been increasing in recent weeks.

According to the CHP's surveillance data, since the commencement of the new school year, the number of institutional HFMD outbreaks recorded has increased from four (affecting 15 persons) in the week ending September 9, to 13 (affecting 38 persons) last week (ending September 23). As of yesterday (September 26), 17 outbreaks involving 42 persons had been reported in the past three days of this week. In the last four weeks, outbreaks mainly occurred in kindergartens and child care centres as well as primary schools.

In addition, the DH's sentinel surveillance of [child care centres/kindergartens](#) and [private medical practitioner clinics](#) also recorded corresponding increases in HFMD activity.

"HFMD occurs throughout the year and a summer peak may usually be recorded from May to July. A smaller peak may also occur from October to December. As young children are more susceptible, parents should stay alert to their health. Institutional outbreaks may occur where HFMD can easily spread among young children with close contact," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"We will issue letters to child care centres, kindergartens and primary and secondary schools to alert them to the latest situation. Schools 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 added.

Management of venues with play facilities should pay special attention to the CHP's [Public Health Advice for Play Facilities](#) on appropriate infection control in activities involving young children under 6 during the peak season.

The spokesman reminded that alcohol-based handrub should not substitute hand hygiene with liquid soap and water, as alcohol does not effectively kill some viruses causing HFMD, for example, enterovirus (EV) 71. To prevent HFMD, members of the public (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 household 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;
 - 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;
 - Children who are ill should be kept out of school until their fever and rash have subsided and all 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 sick children.

The CHP's weekly report, EV SCAN (www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/21639.html), is issued every Friday to report the latest local situation of HFMD. The public may also visit the CHP's page on [HFMD and EV71 infection](#) for more information.