

Hong Kong enters winter influenza season

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (January 11) announced that according to the surveillance data as at January 6, local seasonal influenza activity has continued to increase and exceeded the baseline thresholds, indicating that Hong Kong has entered the winter influenza season. Influenza activity is anticipated to further increase in the coming weeks. All sectors of the community should heighten their vigilance and enhance personal protection measures against influenza.

Following the higher-than-baseline level of influenza admission rate in public hospitals recorded in the last week of last year, the percentage of detections testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses among the respiratory specimens received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch and the Hospital Authority also reached 11.77 per cent during the week ending January 6, which was above the baseline. The majority of positive detections in that period were influenza A(H3) (around 77 per cent).

The influenza admission rate in public hospitals also increased to 0.68 case per 10 000 population in the same period. Separately, the number of reported influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks started to increase after the Christmas and New Year holidays, with a total of 11 relevant institutional outbreaks reported to the CHP in the week ending January 6, affecting 47 persons in total. The 11 outbreaks included two in primary schools, three in residential care homes (RCHs) for the elderly, three in RCHs for persons with disabilities, two in hospitals and one in a special school. The outbreak figures substantially increased between January 7 and 10, during which 91 persons were affected in the 21 institutional outbreak reports received by the CHP, including 13 in primary schools and two in pre-primary institutions.

As ILI outbreaks may happen in a number of schools during the influenza season, schools are reminded to take additional measures to lower transmission of influenza in schools, including actively checking the body temperature of all students every day when they arrive at school to identify those with fever. Students and staff members with fever, regardless of having respiratory symptoms or not, should not attend school. In addition, schools should promptly make a report to the CHP in case an increase in fever or respiratory illnesses among students or staff members is observed for epidemiological investigations and appropriate control measures. The CHP has issued letters to schools to draw their attention. Letters will also be sent to doctors, hospitals, and institutions to appeal for heightened vigilance and appropriate actions to fight against influenza together.

The influenza season in Hong Kong usually lasts for eight to 12 weeks. A spokesman for the CHP said that based on previous surveillance data, after entering the influenza season, the virus activity will continue to rise for a period of time before reaching its peak. Members of the public, especially those with higher risks of influenza infection and its complications, such as

the elderly and children, should receive seasonal influenza vaccination as soon as possible to lower the risks of serious illness and death. High-risk persons should wear a surgical mask when visiting public places, and the public should also wear a surgical mask when taking public transportation or staying in crowded places. Persons with respiratory symptoms, even if mild, are reminded to wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, and seek medical advice promptly with a view to lowering the risk of transmission.

â€œFor the latest information on influenza activity, please visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#). As for vaccination, the public may visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#).