

Maintain hygiene and get vaccinated early against infectious diseases for Christmas and New Year holidays

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 9) reminded the public to practise strict personal, food and environmental hygiene as well as get vaccinated early to guard against some common and travel-related infectious diseases during the the coming Christmas and New Year holidays.

A. Seasonal influenza

The latest surveillance data revealed that the overall activity of seasonal influenza in Hong Kong is still at a low level. While the winter influenza season usually starts in early January, the exact time of arrival cannot be predicted. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public are advised to receive seasonal influenza vaccinations (SIVs) early for protection against seasonal influenza.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Of note, besides high-risk groups such as the elderly, children and persons with chronic illnesses, healthy people may also contract influenza and develop complications. Noting that the vaccination rate among people aged 50 to 64 is lower compared with other groups, we appeal to those in the age group to receive their SIV early via the 'Vaccination Subsidy Scheme' to safeguard the health of themselves and their families."

Globally, influenza activity has been increasing in the temperate region of the northern hemisphere with co-circulation of influenza A(H1), A(H3) and B viruses. The winter influenza season has already started in the United States, Canada and Japan.

For more details of the vaccination programmes, the public may enquire through the CHP's telephone number (2125 2125) or visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#).

B. Measles

There has been a global resurgence of measles since 2018. In 2019, outbreaks occurred in some places that had achieved measles elimination, such as Japan, Macao, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The incidence in some neighbouring countries remained at a high level, including New Zealand, the Philippines and Thailand. The large outbreak in the Philippines is still ongoing with over 42,000 cases recorded so far in 2019. Hong Kong has recorded 91 measles cases in 2019 (as of December 8). Among them, 40 (44 per cent) were classified as imported cases including six cases affecting foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) working in Hong Kong.

The spokesman said, "Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles. To boost the community's herd immunity against measles, the CHP earlier this year launched a one-off mop-up programme to provide free measles vaccinations to FDHs working in Hong Kong. Eligible FDHs are urged to use the opportunity to receive measles vaccinations to protect themselves, their families and their employers' families before the programme ends on February 15, 2020. For details and appointment methods, please visit the CHP's website www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102004.html."

Members of the public who are planning to travel to places with a high incidence or outbreaks of measles should review their vaccination history and past medical history, especially people born outside Hong Kong who might not have received measles vaccinations during childhood. Those who have not received two doses of measles-containing vaccines, with unknown vaccination histories or unknown immunities against measles, are urged to consult their doctor for advice on vaccinations at least two weeks before departure.

"Pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy who are not immune to measles as well as children aged under 1 year who are not due for the first dose of the measles, mumps and rubella-combined vaccine under the [Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme](#) are advised not to travel to places with outbreaks of measles," the spokesman said.

C. Dengue Fever

As of December 5, 193 Dengue Fever (DF) cases had been recorded this year (including 192 imported cases and one local case), as compared with 157 cases recorded in the same period last year. The imported cases were mainly from Thailand (32), Malaysia (27) and the Philippines (24).

The CHP has been closely monitoring the latest DF situation in neighbouring and overseas areas. DF is endemic in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world. According to the World Health Organization, some Asian countries are experiencing unusually high numbers of DF cases this year. The numbers of cases in some places were significantly higher than the numbers for the same period in 2018, including Guangdong Province, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

"To prevent mosquito-borne diseases, travellers should wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or exposed parts of the body. Travellers returning from areas affected by DF and the Zika virus infection should apply insect repellent for 14 days or at least 21 days respectively upon arrival in Hong Kong," the spokesman said.

D. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

Members of the public should also pay attention to cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) abroad. Countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time,

and travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients.

"From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involved patients with a history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV," the spokesman said.

E. Food poisoning

When consuming party food or hot pot in gatherings during the festive season, the public should consume thoroughly washed and cooked food. For shellfish, the shells should be well scrubbed and the internal organs removed before consumption. Never use raw eggs as a dipping sauce. Use different chopsticks to handle raw and cooked food to avoid cross-contamination. For more food safety tips, please visit the [webpage of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department's Centre for Food Safety](#).

For more details of the above infectious diseases, please visit the CHP's pages on [seasonal influenza](#), [measles](#), [dengue fever](#), [MERS](#) and [food poisoning](#). Those planning to travel can also visit the [Travel Health Service's website](#) for the latest travel health news and advice.