

Overview of tuberculosis in Hong Kong educational institutions in second half of 2023

The Tuberculosis and Chest Service (TB&CS) of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced today (February 29) tuberculosis (TB) notification in educational institutions in the second half of 2023. The CHP urges the public, especially the stakeholders of schools, including school management, students and parents, to maintain personal and environmental hygiene at all times to prevent TB infections.

The DH received 1 654 notifications of TB cases (provisional figure) from July to December 2023, among which 48 cases were aged 3 to 24 (usual school age), accounting for 2.90 per cent of the total notified cases in the same period. The corresponding proportion of TB cases for the above age group in the second half of 2021 and 2022 were 4.32 per cent and 4.12 per cent respectively.

For TB in school settings in Hong Kong, two TB clusters were found from July to December 2023 comprising four cases. The information has been uploaded to the [TB&CS statistics webpage](#).

"Early identification of TB cases and prompt initiation of anti-TB treatment remain the mainstay of TB control. While the TB notification rate in Hong Kong has showed a consistent decrease in the past few decades, TB remains a relatively common disease in Hong Kong. The DH has all along promoted awareness of TB and its prevention in schools, the community and the healthcare sector so as to facilitate early identification, diagnosis and effective control of the disease at its source," a spokesman for the DH said.

The spokesman explained that TB is an airborne disease. When a TB patient coughs or sneezes, small droplets containing the tubercle bacilli are generated and spread in the air. If another person breathes in these small airborne droplets, he or she may be infected with the germ. Prolonged exposure, however, is usually the most important condition for the disease to be effectively transmitted.

The TB&CS of the CHP also conducts contact investigations for the close contacts of the index case where necessary. The TB&CS has also prepared guidelines on handling TB cases in the school setting for reference by schools. For more information, please refer to the guidelines available at https://www.info.gov.hk/tb_chest/en/contents/Guidelines_School.htm.

Members of the public should maintain continued vigilance against TB and adopt a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet, avoid smoking and alcohol, and have suitable exercise and adequate rest. If symptoms develop, such as a persistent cough, blood in sputum, weight loss, fever and night sweating, they should seek prompt medical advice. If diagnosed as having TB,

a patient should strengthen respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, and receive TB treatment under supervision. For more TB-related information, services and figures, the public may also visit the [website of the TB&CS](#) or call the telephone hotline (2572 6024).