

Overview of tuberculosis in Hong Kong in 2020 and half-yearly review of tuberculosis in educational institutions in 2021

The Tuberculosis and Chest Service (TB&CS) of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced today (September 6) the tuberculosis (TB) notifications to the DH in 2020 as well as TB in the educational institutions in the first half of 2021. Upon the commencement of the new school year, stakeholders of schools, including school management, students and parents are also reminded to maintain personal and environmental hygiene at all times to prevent TB infections.

The TB&CS received 3 699 notification of TB cases (provisional figure) in 2020, representing 49.3 cases per 100 000 of the population. The rate of multidrug-resistant TB remains low at below 1 per cent.

"Despite a marked and consistent decrease in the notification rate in the past few decades, TB remains a relatively common disease in Hong Kong. Moreover, clustering of TB cases in the educational institutions occurs from time to time. It is often related to delayed presentation or diagnosis of the case due to its long latent period, which in turn affect early identification," a spokesman for the DH said.

Among the notified TB cases in 2020, 182 cases aged 3 to 24 (usual school age). In the same year, there were seven clusters of TB cases in school settings comprising 14 patients.

From January to June this year, there were four clusters of TB cases in school settings. Comprising 10 patients in total, the sizes of the clusters range from two to four cases. Two patients suffered from multidrug-resistant TB but were all under effective treatment. The data of the clusters has also been uploaded to the [TB&CS statistics webpage](#).

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.

Early identification of TB cases and prompt initiation of anti-TB treatment remain the mainstay of TB control. The TB&CS also conducts contact investigation 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, the guidelines are available at the TB&CS [guideline website](#).

The TB&CS of the CHP endeavours to promote 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.

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 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 observe 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 CHP's page on [World TB Day](#) and the [website of the TB&CS](#) or call the telephone hotline (2572 6024).