

Public urged to continue to stay vigilant against Mpox

The Government said today (August 15) that it will continue to closely monitor the Mpox (also known as Monkeypox) situation and enhance preventive measures following the declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO) of the recent Mpox outbreak development in Africa as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Members of the public are urged to heighten vigilance and avoid close physical contact with persons suspected of contracting Mpox. Meanwhile, high-risk target groups are advised to receive Mpox vaccinations.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) officially declared the ongoing Mpox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security (PHECS) on August 13. In recent weeks, there has been a sustained increase in the number of Mpox cases and outbreaks reported in countries in the WHO African Region. According to Africa CDC, at least 13 African countries reported Mpox outbreaks and have confirmed 2 863 cases and 517 deaths in 2024, primarily in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In light of the emergence of a new sexually transmissible Mpox strain and its rapid spread in eastern DRC and several neighbouring countries of the DRC, and the potential for further international spread within and outside Africa, the WHO today announced that the upsurge of Mpox to be a PHEIC.

Case investigations and subsequent outbreak investigations in DRC confirmed human-to-human transmission of the new Mpox strain, while some of the cases reported no history of animal exposure. In 2024, children represented the most affected age group in cases in the DRC, with 39 per cent of the cases reported in children aged under 5 years old. Available information suggests that the current modes of transmission in Africa are more diverse, including human-to-human transmission due to different types of physical or close direct or indirect contact and, in some settings, also zoonotic exposure.

Hong Kong has put in place the Preparedness and Response Plan for Mpox (the Plan) since June 2022. Subsequent to the confirmation of the first Mpox case in September 2022 in Hong Kong, the Government activated the alert response level under the Plan and implemented preventive measures accordingly, including enhanced surveillance, strengthening port health measures, quarantine preparedness and hospital preparedness. Mechanisms are in place in Hong Kong to ensure swift and interdepartmental responses to public health threats on emerging infectious diseases.

As at August 14, a total of 67 Mpox cases (54 local and 13 imported) have been recorded in Hong Kong since 2022, among which 13 of them are recorded this year. All of the 67 cases were males. Epidemiological investigation showed that most cases involved men who have sex with men (MSM)/bisexual with history of high-risk sexual behaviours, including having sex with strangers or unsafe sex.

In view of the latest developments, the Department of Health (DH) has issued letter to doctors and hospitals in Hong Kong, urging them to be aware and report suspected cases for prompt epidemiological investigation and contact tracing. The DH will strengthen travel health advice to people visiting Africa and will enhance public education on the prevention of Mpox through various online and offline channels. Relevant stakeholders in the community including the ethnic minority groups will be informed as well.

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH commenced the Mpox Vaccination Programme in October 2022, using a third-generation vaccine for contacts of confirmed cases as well as individuals at high risk of exposure on a voluntary basis. From the commencement of the programme to August 11 this year, over 16 700 doses of vaccines were administered.

The CHP appeals to high-risk target groups to receive Mpox vaccinations with a view to lowering the risk of infection or the possibility of having more severe symptoms after infection. Mpox vaccine is effective against the new Mpox strain emerging in the DRC.

In addition to the vaccination programme, the CHP has also set up an Mpox telephone hotline (2125 2373). The hotline operates from Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays) from 9am to 5pm, which enables persons who suspect or are concerned they have had high-risk contact with confirmed patients to make enquiries and receive relevant health advices.

The DH will continue to closely monitor the global epidemiological situation and make preparations to prevent the spread of Mpox. The Preparedness and Response Plan for Mpox published by the Government is available on the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/preparedness_and_response_plan_for_monkeypox_eng.pdf).