

Public urged to heighten vigilance against influenza

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (July 13) urged members of the public to heighten their vigilance against seasonal influenza as the latest surveillance data indicated that the local seasonal influenza activity has increased in the past few weeks.

"With the increasing trend of local seasonal influenza activity, members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, are urged to receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) as early as possible. Strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene should be observed at all times," a spokesman for the CHP said.

While the previous influenza season ended in May this year, the CHP has been continuing its close monitoring on the local influenza situation. Among the respiratory specimens received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch and the Hospital Authority, the weekly percentage of detections tested positive for seasonal influenza A or B viruses has increased from 1.85 per cent in the week ending June 17 to 5.71 per cent in the week ending July 8. The baseline threshold has yet been exceeded. The majority of positive detections in the past month were influenza A(H3) viruses.

In public hospitals, the admission rates with a principal diagnosis of influenza have also increased, particularly among persons aged under 12 years and those aged 65 years or above. The overall admission rate with a principal diagnosis of influenza has increased from 0.08 cases (per 10 000 population) in the week ending June 17 to 0.21 cases (per 10 000 population) in the week ending July 8.

"The recent increasing trend in activity of seasonal influenza mentioned above may associate with a possible summer peak. Past surveillance data showed that activity of seasonal influenza usually peaked between January and March/April whereas another peak during July to August could also be observed in some years. The CHP will continue to closely monitor the situation," the spokesman added.

The Government has launched in phases various seasonal influenza vaccination programmes since September last year to provide eligible members of the public with free or subsidised SIV. Since SIV is one of the effective means to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications, as well as reduce influenza-related hospitalisation and death, all persons aged 6 months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive SIV for personal protection. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public, particularly persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive SIV early.

Besides receiving SIV as early as possible for personal protection, the public is reminded to observe the following measures to prevent influenza and respiratory tract infections:

- Surgical masks can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;
- For high-risk persons (e.g. persons with underlying medical conditions or persons who are immunocompromised), wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching one's eyes, mouth and nose;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub;
- Cover the nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly into a lidded rubbish bin, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly; and
- Build up good body immunity by having a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

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