

Public urged to stay vigilant against COVID-19 and influenza

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (August 10) urged members of the public to stay vigilant against COVID-19 and influenza, and reminded the public to continue to maintain personal, hand, and environmental hygiene.

A spokesman for the CHP pointed out that COVID-19 has now been managed as an upper respiratory tract illness and the Government has been closely monitoring the global and local situation, and assessing the risk. In view of the latest announcement by the World Health Organization (WHO) to designate COVID-19 variant EG.5 and its sub-lineages as a Variant of Interest (VOI), members of the public are reminded that vaccination can effectively prevent infection and serious cases.

According to the WHO, EG.5 is a descendent lineage of XBB.1.9.2. Based on the available evidence, the public health risk posed by EG.5 is evaluated as low at the global level, aligning with the risk associated with XBB.1.16 and the other currently circulating VOIs. There have been no reported changes in disease severity to date. However, due to its growth advantage and immune escape characteristics, EG.5 may cause a rise in case incidence and become dominant in some countries, or even globally.

Locally, according to the CHP's latest surveillance data, COVID-19 activity has dropped. In the week from July 30 to August 5, the daily number of newly recorded positive laboratory detections (ranged from 47 to 73), the positive detection rate of specimens collected at the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) of the CHP (5.62 per cent, as compared to 6.68 per cent in the previous week), the weekly number of severe COVID-19 cases including deaths with cause of death preliminarily assessed to be related to COVID-19 (28, as compared to 37 in the preceding week), as well as surveillance among sentinel general out-patient clinics (51.8 per 1,000 consultations, as compared to 57.2 in the preceding week), all showed a decreasing trend when compared to the preceding week.

According to the genetic characterisation by the PHLSB on the specimens testing positive for COVID-19, as well as reported severe and death cases for COVID-19, XBB and its descendant lineages continue to be the most prevalent variant, comprised of more than 95 per cent of all characterised specimens, with EG.5 accounting for about 5.3 per cent. The first EG.5 case in Hong Kong was recorded during the week ending April 22.

On the other hand, the CHP has been closely monitoring the local influenza situation. The overall local seasonal influenza activity has increased since the week ending July 1. Among the respiratory specimens received by the PHLSB and the Hospital Authority, the latest weekly percentage of detections testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses was 8.31 per cent during the week ending August 5, with influenza A (H3) being

the predominant subtype. The overall admission rate with a principal diagnosis of influenza was 0.29 (per 10,000 population) during the same week.

The CHP will continue to monitor the situation. Members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and chronic disease patients are strongly urged to receive vaccination as early as possible for effective protection against COVID-19. Receiving COVID-19 vaccination can effectively reduce the risk of serious illness and death from infection. As influenza viruses and the SARS-CoV-2 virus may both spread at the same time, getting an influenza vaccination is also important to protect the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. People aged 6 months or above who have not yet received the seasonal influenza vaccination in the 2022/23 season can still receive the vaccine to enhance personal protection.

The CHP again reminded members of the public to take the following measures to prevent respiratory tract infections:

- 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; and
- Build up good body immunity by having a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

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