

Public urged to stay vigilant against infectious diseases during holiday

With the approach of the New Year's Eve and New Year holiday, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 29) appealed to members of the public who intend to travel to stay alert to the situation of infectious diseases in their destinations. The CHP is aware of the recent Zika Virus Infection in Thailand and specifically reminded members of the public to adopt necessary precautions to guard against mosquito-borne diseases when travelling abroad.

According to information of the Thailand health authority, a total of 742 Zika Virus Infection cases have been recorded from January to December 22 this year, among which 160 were recorded in Bangkok, which was much higher than the number of cases in the country, ranging from 63 to 239 annually in the past three years. While most people infected with Zika virus infection would not present with symptoms (e.g. fever, rash, headache, joint pain and conjunctivitis), Zika Virus Infection during pregnancy may cause microcephaly and other congenital malformations in the infant. As such, pregnant women should pay close attention to the infection risk if they travel to affected areas.

In view of the recent increase in number of Zika Virus Infection cases in Thailand, the CHP specifically reminded members of the public, especially pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy, that they must adopt necessary precautions against mosquito-borne diseases. The CHP has already provided the latest information and preventive measures targeting mosquito-borne diseases at its [Zika page](#) and the [Travel Health Service](#) website. Travellers can also take note of the health messages at airport and on plane. Besides, the CHP's Port Health Division has enhanced inspection against flights returning to Hong Kong from areas of active Zika virus transmission to prevent the importation of diseases through infected mosquitoes and will ensure the environmental hygiene at boundary control points against mosquito infestation.

A spokesman for the CHP reiterated that, members of the public should follow stringent anti-mosquito measures when travelling, and take note that visiting other places such as Southeast Asia, India, and America may also have a chance to acquire Zika Virus Infection. Apart from [general measures on preventing mosquito bites and mosquito breeding](#), all travellers including pregnant women who return from affected areas should apply insect repellent containing DEET for at least 21 days after arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell after return such as having fever, they should seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor.

Also, with the weather becoming cool and the approach of holiday, there has been an increasing trend in activity of SARS-CoV-2 and seasonal influenza viruses. Laboratory testing data involving paediatric patients of the Hospital Authority revealed that the rhinovirus/enterovirus continues to have

the highest activity level among the respiratory pathogens. The next active pathogen is adenovirus and is on a rising trend. Although most of the respiratory pathogens are not vaccine-preventable, receiving COVID-19 and influenza vaccines could reduce the risk of death and also severe complications caused by co-infection of other respiratory infectious diseases. The CHP strongly appeal to high risk persons who have not received relevant vaccines to receive vaccination as soon as possible before a period of high incidence of COVID-19 and influenza.

As wearing a surgical mask could effectively prevent the transmission of respiratory infections, the CHP again reminds high risk persons to wear a surgical mask when visiting public places, and the public should also wear a surgical mask when taking public transportations (including the Mass Transit Railway or buses) or staying at crowded places (e.g. when using elevator).

The CHP will continue to monitor local and overseas situation of infectious diseases and provide latest information to the members of the public timely for better understanding on the development of infectious diseases and preparation on precautionary works.