

Public urged to work together to fight against tuberculosis

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (March 24) urged the public to work together to prevent tuberculosis (TB) infection by maintaining personal and environmental hygiene at all times in support of World TB Day 2024.

The World Health Organization has designated March 24 of each year as World TB Day to raise public awareness and knowledge about TB and encourage global efforts to combat TB together.

According to the CHP's latest statistics, there were 3 260 notifications of TB cases (provisional figure) recorded in Hong Kong in 2023, and with about 170 TB-related deaths (half of them are persons aged 80 or above). Despite a marked and consistent decrease in the notification figures in Hong Kong in the past few decades, TB is still an important infectious disease around the globe. A cautious approach to the prevention work of TB needs to be maintained.

"To enhance public awareness, besides disseminating TB-related information on the Internet and social media platforms, the CHP will also work with the Hong Kong Tuberculosis, Chest and Heart Diseases Association and the Hospital Authority to organise a series of health education talks. By doing this, we can remind the public about the importance of staying vigilant as well as early diagnosis and treatment of TB. Likewise, preventive measures against TB have to be reinforced in order to achieve the goal of eliminating TB," a CHP spokesman said.

Early identification of TB cases and prompt initiation of anti-TB treatment remain the mainstay of TB control. The chest clinics under the CHP provide TB patients with free outpatient consultation and treatment. The spokesman added that the treatment of TB involves a prescription of multiple medications which normally lasts for six months, and TB patients should stringently comply with the treatment regimen to minimise the emergence of drug-resistant TB.

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 prerequisite for the disease to be effectively transmitted. The spokesman reminded members of the public to 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 to minimise the chance of contracting the disease. 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 disease, the patient should strengthen their respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, and receive TB

treatment under the doctor's advice.

For more TB-related information, services and figures, the public may also visit the CHP's page designated for World TB Day (www.info.gov.hk/tb_chest/worldtbdays.htm) and the website of the Tuberculosis and Chest Service (www.info.gov.hk/tb_chest), or call the telephone hotline (2572 6024).