

# DH appeals for heightened vigilance against respiratory tract infection

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (October 20) urged members of the public to heighten their vigilance against respiratory tract infection, including COVID-19, seasonal influenza and Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection, and stressed that vaccination can effectively prevent serious COVID-19 and influenza cases. The CHP also reminded persons who are symptomatic, even if having mild symptoms, to wear a surgical mask and seek medical advice promptly with a view to lowering the risk of high-risk persons being infected. Strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene should also be observed at all times.

The CHP has been closely monitoring the local situation of influenza and COVID-19. The overall local seasonal influenza activity has decreased recently, but remained above the epidemic seasonal threshold and may increase in the winter season.

While the COVID-19 activity remained stable, the CHP still recorded outbreaks in schools/institution and death cases. The CHP received a report of a COVID-19 death case last night (October 19) involving a 20-month-old boy with good past health. He developed fever, cough and runny nose, and tested positive for COVID-19 through a rapid antigen test on October 17. His fever persisted and he developed poor appetite on October 18. He was taken to the Accident and Emergency Department at United Christian Hospital (UCH) on the same day and was admitted to UCH's Paediatric Intensive Care Unit for management. His nasopharyngeal swab was positive for COVID-19 virus upon laboratory testing. The clinical diagnosis was COVID-19 infection complicated with acute necrotising encephalopathy, pneumonia, sepsis and shock. His condition deteriorated and passed away yesterday.

The CHP again reminded members of the public that as influenza viruses and the SARS-CoV-2 virus may both spread at the same time, getting influenza and COVID-19 vaccination is of vital importance in protecting the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. The CHP strongly urged members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, to receive vaccination as early as possible for effective protection against COVID-19 and influenza. Details of receiving both COVID-19 vaccination and seasonal influenza vaccination are available online ([www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106096.html](http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106096.html)). Eligible persons can make reservation on the designated website ([booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk](http://booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk)).

Moreover, the CHP is aware of the Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection on the Mainland. The CHP has all along been collecting data from the laboratory and public hospitals to monitor the situation of Mycoplasma pneumoniae in Hong Kong. Historical data showed that cyclical high activity of Mycoplasma pneumoniae was recorded every few years, with the last period of high local activity occurring in 2016 and 2019. According to the latest local surveillance data, hospital admission attributed to Mycoplasma pneumoniae

infection has been increased since August this year, although it has not reached the peak level in 2016 and 2019. The CHP will issue letters to alert doctors, continue to monitor the developments and maintain communication with counterparts on the Mainland.

Mycoplasma is a common pathogen that spreads mainly through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of infected people especially when they cough and sneeze. The incubation period is about three weeks. Common symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat and malaise. Most of the patients with minor infection may recover on their own, while some patients may present with pneumonia. Although there is no vaccine against Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection currently, appropriate antibiotics are effective for treatment of patients.

"Wearing a surgical mask is important in preventing respiratory tract infections, including Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection. For persons with respiratory symptoms, even if the symptoms are mild, they should wear a surgical mask. Symptomatic patients should refrain from work or attending classes at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly with a view to lowering the risk of spreading the disease to high-risk persons (e.g. persons with underlying medical conditions or persons who are immunocompromised). They should perform hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask," the spokesman stressed.

The CHP also 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](#). For Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection, please visit the CHP's [Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection page](#).

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## Mui Wo Swimming Pool to be reopened

Attention TV/ radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (October 20) that Mui Wo Swimming Pool in Islands District, closed earlier due to an insufficient number of lifeguards on duty, will be reopened at 7pm today.

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## Clusters of Respiratory Syncytial Virus and Carbapenemase-Producing Enterobacteriaceae cases in Tung Wah Eastern Hospital

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for Tung Wah Eastern Hospital (TWEH) made the following announcement today (October 20):

Four female patients (aged 69 to 96) in a medicine and rehabilitation ward had presented with upper respiratory symptoms since October 16. Appropriate tests had been arranged for the patients with positive test results for Respiratory Syncytial Virus.

Three male patients (aged 76 to 93) in another medicine and rehabilitation ward had been confirmed as carriers of Carbapenemase-Producing Enterobacteriaceae since October 10.

All patients are still hospitalised in isolation and in stable condition.

Infection control measures have already been stepped up according to established guidelines. All other patients in the wards are under close surveillance.

TWEH has reported the cases to the Hospital Authority Head Office and the Centre for Health Protection for necessary follow-up.

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## Nine persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations (with photos)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Twilight" and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" and "Windsand" for four consecutive days from October 16 to yesterday (October 19). A total of six suspected illegal workers and three suspected employers were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 17 target locations including restaurants, residential buildings and a retail shop. Three suspected illegal workers and three suspected employers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised three women, aged 28 to 46. Among them, one woman was a holder of a recognisance form, which prohibits her from taking any employment. One man and two women, aged 38 to 55, were suspected of employing the illegal workers and were also arrested.

During operation "Champion", enforcement officers raided 47 target locations in Central district. Two suspected illegal workers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised one man and one woman, aged 31 and 56. The man was a holder of a recognisance form, which prohibits him from taking any employment.

Furthermore, during operation "Windsand", one male Mainland visitor, aged 56, was arrested for breaching his condition of stay by being involved in suspected illegal parallel trading activities at San Wan Road in Sheung Shui district. The goods were clothes.

An ImmD spokesman said, "Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him or her shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties."

The spokesman warned, "As stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment."

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law by employing illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct an initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the ImmD officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter or temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.



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## [Notice about shredded banknotes paperweights sold by HKMA](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

It has recently come to the attention of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) that shredded banknotes paperweights sold at the HKMA Information Centre contain pebbles to make them heavier and enhance their function as paperweights. Therefore, the number of shredded banknotes inside each paperweight falls short of the approximate number stated on the paperweight label. If any member of the public who has purchased a paperweight wishes to return the product, they are advised to contact the HKMA Information Centre by calling the Hotline (2878 1111) or by email ([info\\_centre@hkma.gov.hk](mailto:info_centre@hkma.gov.hk)) to arrange for a refund.

The HKMA apologises for any inconvenience caused.