

Travellers reminded of precautions against infectious diseases for healthy trips in summer vacation

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (June 28) reminded members of the public who plan to travel during the summer vacation to stay alert to the situation of infectious diseases in their destinations, and to observe strict personal and environmental hygiene to guard against some common and travel-related diseases.

A. Dengue Fever

Regarding the latest dengue fever (DF) situation in Hong Kong, from June 21 to 27, the CHP recorded two imported DF cases. The patients had been to Indonesia (one case) and Malaysia (one case) during the incubation period.

As of yesterday (June 27), 67 cases had been recorded this year, all of which were imported. The cases were mainly imported from Thailand (14), Indonesia (12) and Malaysia (12).

The CHP has been closely monitoring the latest DF situation in neighbouring and overseas areas. DF is endemic in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some Asian countries are experiencing unusually high numbers of DF cases for this time of year. The number of cases in several countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam was about two to four times the number for the same period in 2018.

According to the announcement of the Health Commission of Guangdong Province on June 13, the epidemic season of DF started early this year in Guangdong. As of June 12, 240 cases had been recorded in Guangdong this year, which was significantly higher than that in the same period last year (44 cases). In Taiwan, 208 cases (including 27 local cases) have been recorded in 2019 (as of June 27).

Detailed information on the latest DF situation in Hong Kong as well as neighbouring and overseas countries and areas this year is uploaded to the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/df_imported_cases_and_overseas_figures_eng.pdf).

"To prevent mosquito-borne diseases, travellers should wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or exposed parts of the body. Travellers returning from areas affected by DF and Zika virus infection should apply insect repellent for 14 days or at least 21 days respectively upon arrival in Hong Kong," a spokesman for the CHP said.

B. Measles

There has been a global resurgence of measles since 2018 with worsening of the situation in 2019. According to the provisional data from the WHO, the number of measles cases had quadrupled worldwide in the first three months of 2019 as compared with the same period of 2018. In the first two months of 2019, 34 300 measles cases have been reported in the WHO European Region, as compared with 83 540 and 25 869 cases in the whole year of 2018 and 2017 respectively. In Southeast Asia, the outbreak in the Philippines is on-going with nearly 35 000 cases reported in 2019 (as of May 11) and the incidence in some countries, such as Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, remained much higher than that in Hong Kong.

"Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles. Members of the public who are planning to travel to places with high incidence or outbreaks of measles should review their vaccination history and past medical history, especially people born outside Hong Kong who might not have received measles vaccination during childhood. Those with incomplete vaccination, unknown vaccination history or unknown immunity against measles are urged to consult their doctor for advice on vaccination at least two weeks before departure. Pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy who are not immune to measles as well as children aged under 1 year who are not due for the first dose of the measles, mumps and rubella combined vaccine under the [Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme](#) are advised not to travel to places with outbreaks of measles," the spokesman said.

C. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

Members of the public should also pay attention to cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) abroad. Countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time, travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients.

Scientific evidence showed that camels are reservoirs for MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through nasal and eye discharge, faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus may also be found in the raw organs and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best protection is to practise good hygiene and avoid direct contact with all of these.

"From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involved patients with history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV," the spokesman said.

D. Seasonal Influenza

Increased influenza detections were reported from countries in the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere. The 2019 influenza season appeared to have started earlier than previous years in some countries including Australia, Chile, South Africa and New Zealand. In Oceania, influenza activity increased across the continent, with influenza A(H3N2) being the dominant subtype. In Australia, influenza activity is high for this time of year as compared to previous years, and the majority of confirmed influenza cases were influenza A while the proportion of influenza B has been steadily increasing. Influenza season also started earlier in New Zealand, with co-circulation of influenza A(H3N2) and B viruses. The positivity rate of influenza viruses was one of the highest for this period in recent years.

Members of the general public aged 6 months or above (except those with known contraindications) who have not yet received any seasonal influenza vaccination in the 2018-19 season can still receive it for personal protection against seasonal influenza. Moreover, people should always take the following measures to prevent respiratory and other infections:

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70-80 per cent alcohol-based handrub as an effective alternative;
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin;
- Put on a surgical mask when develop respiratory symptoms;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation; and
- Avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places; high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks in such places.

The public may also visit the CHP's pages on [DF](#), [measles](#), [MERS](#) and [seasonal influenza](#) for more information.