

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 29) reminded members of the public to observe personal and environmental hygiene, and follow travel health advice on some infectious diseases for better protection for themselves and their families during travel in the summer vacation.

A. Mosquito-borne diseases

There are numerous mosquito-borne diseases, including dengue fever (DF), Japanese encephalitis (JE), malaria, yellow fever and Zika virus infection. Among them, DF remains an endemic infection in some countries and areas in Southeast Asia, while yellow fever is endemic in various countries and areas in Africa and Central and South America.

The CHP continues to record imported DF cases in Hong Kong. From June 22 to 28, two new cases were confirmed and the patients had been to Thailand (one case) and Vietnam (one case) in the incubation period.

As of yesterday (June 28), among the 39 cases in 2018, 17 were imported from Thailand, followed by the Philippines (eight) and Cambodia (four), with no local cases so far.

DF remains endemic in some areas in Asia and overseas. In Guangdong, there were 38 cases in the first five months of this year. The latest figures for 2018 reveal that 22 539 cases have been recorded in Thailand, 1 353 in Singapore (since December 31, 2017) and 59 in Japan.

"Although symptoms of first infection are usually mild, the public should note that subsequent infections with other serotypes are more likely to result in severe dengue, which may progress to shock or death. If symptoms such as fever develop during travel, seek medical advice immediately for prompt diagnosis and treatment," a spokesman for the CHP said.

To reduce the risk of infections spread by mosquitoes, travellers should observe the CHP's special notes in their trip:

- Currently, vaccines are available as preventive measures against yellow fever and JE, while anti-malarial chemoprophylaxis is also available. Members of the public planning to travel to affected areas should consult their doctors for advice on vaccination or chemoprophylaxis. Travellers planning to receive yellow fever vaccination and travel health medical advice should arrange travel health consultation with the DH's Travel Health Service (THS) at least six to eight weeks before the

trip;

- Apart from adopting [general measures](#), applying DEET-containing insect repellents is also an effective measure against mosquitoes. The public may refer to the CHP's [tips for using insect repellents](#) for details;
- During the trip, if travelling in endemic rural areas, carry a portable bed net and apply permethrin (an insecticide) on it. Permethrin should not be applied to the skin. Seek medical attention promptly if feeling unwell; and
- Travellers returning from DF and Zika virus infection affected areas should apply insect repellent for 14 days and at least 21 days respectively upon arrival.

B. Measles

Measles remains an endemic infection in many places around the world. In Southeast Asia, according to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), as of June 7, the 12-month measles incidence (number of cases per million population) had reached 79.0, 72.4, 24.7 and 24.3 in Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia respectively. In Europe, there were marked increases in measles cases in recent months, with the highest 12-month incidence (number of cases per million population) in Greece (255.6), Romania (108.3), Italy (66.6) and France (36.4). The measles incidence levels in these countries are far higher than that of Hong Kong, which was 1.4 cases per million population in the previous 12 months.

"Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles. As the summer vacation is approaching, 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 non-locally born people who might not have received measles vaccination during childhood. Information on the history of measles vaccination in Hong Kong is available from the CHP's [measles page](#)," the spokesman said.

"Those with incomplete vaccination, unknown vaccination history or unknown immunity against measles are urged to consult their doctor for advice on measles 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 added.

C. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

As countries in the Middle East, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), continue to record cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), travellers should remain vigilant on the disease activity and avoid high-risk behaviour.

"Studies show that humans were infected through direct or indirect contact with infected dromedary camels, which are a major host for MERS

Coronavirus and an animal source of infection in humans. Human-to-human transmission can also occur through close contact. We again urge travellers to the Middle East to avoid going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels," the spokesman said.

To date, 2 220 cases have been reported to the WHO, with at least 790 deaths. There have been 2 003 cases in 10 Middle East countries including 1 844 in the KSA, 87 in the United Arab Emirates, 28 in Jordan, 19 in Qatar, 11 in Oman, six in Iran, four in Kuwait, two in Lebanon and one each in Yemen and Bahrain.

Travellers may refer to the latest Travel Health News easily by selecting a destination or disease on the front page of the DH's [THS](#). Health advice on DF, MERS, Zika virus infection and avian influenza are available for the public's easy reference. Travellers returning to Hong Kong who are feeling unwell should seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor.

The CHP has also prepared easy-to-read infographics (see attachments) for the public and travellers on necessary health precautions both locally and during travel.