

Tripartite meeting enhances co-operation against communicable diseases (with photos)

The two-day 19th Tripartite Meeting on Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases successfully concluded in Hong Kong today (September 27). Representatives from the health authorities of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao conducted exchanges and discussions at the meeting on various topics including disease surveillance, prevention, and notification mechanisms to enhance the co-operation and preparedness of the three places against communicable diseases.

The tripartite meeting was chaired by the heads of the health authorities of the three places, namely the Deputy Director General of the Health Commission of Guangdong Province, Mr Chen Zhushen; the Director of Health of Hong Kong, Dr Constance Chan; and the Director of the Health Bureau of Macao, Dr Lei Chin-ion. Around 90 representatives from the three places attended the meeting, including those from the Hospital Authority of Hong Kong (HA).

Addressing the meeting, Hong Kong's Dr Chan said, "With the rapid development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and more frequent tripartite co-operation, it has become increasingly important to enhance the prevention and control of communicable diseases, handling of public health incidents, information exchanges, notification mechanisms, staff trainings and scientific research among the three places".

Dr Chan noted that the three places have faced various public health challenges this year. These include the outbreak of measles infection, the high incidence rate of dengue fever and chikungunya fever in neighbouring countries and places, as well as emerging diseases such as human infection of rat Hepatitis E virus and Candida auris infection. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for experts from the three places to hold in-depth exchanges on topics such as communicable diseases and infection control in healthcare facilities, while exploring corresponding measures in surveillance, control and prevention.

The meeting reviewed and concluded tripartite co-operation in surveillance, prevention and notification mechanisms. Participants also conducted exchanges and discussions in the following areas: situation of major communicable diseases, laboratory surveillance and standardisation of testing methods of major communicable diseases, sharing of laboratory information, work and capacity building for the World Health Organization's "Global Influenza Strategy for 2019-2030" as well as infection control in healthcare facilities.

Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao reached consensus at the 19th tripartite

meeting in the following areas:

1. Enhance tripartite co-operation and capabilities in disease prevention and control as well as handling public health emergencies; organise regular meetings and promote exchanges of information and experience.
2. Implement the co-operation agreement on public health emergencies in the three places to enhance and optimise the system for handling public health emergencies and major communicable diseases such as pandemic influenza.
3. Foster collaboration among health institutions in the three places on infection prevention and control in healthcare facilities to reduce public health risks.
4. Continue to promote research on infectious diseases and information exchanges, including laboratory surveillance methods and standards, and collection and analysis of data on pathogens.
5. Further improve the notification mechanism to strengthen co-operation and maximise the outcomes; the three places reaffirm that the existing notification mechanism has been smooth and has played an active and important role in the control and prevention of communicable diseases as well as the release of information to the media and the public.
6. Taking into consideration the practical needs of the three places in disease prevention and control, continue to foster exchanges and trainings among experts in areas that include disease surveillance, outbreak investigations, field epidemiology, emergency response, laboratory testing and infection control in healthcare facilities.

On the second day of the meeting, a table-top exercise codenamed "Shield" was conducted by the Health Commission of Guangdong Province, the Department of Health (DH) of Hong Kong, the Health Bureau of Macao and the centres for disease control of the three places, together with relevant departments in Hong Kong, namely the HA, the Fire Services Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Environmental Protection Department. The drill aimed to test the preparedness and enhance the capacities in the responses of the three places to Ebola virus disease (EVD).

The drill simulated three university students from Guangdong Province, Macao and Hong Kong who were infected with Ebola virus during their graduation trip to Africa. The Hong Kong student was the first to develop relevant symptoms after returning from the trip. The case was classified as a suspected case of EVD when the student sought medical treatment. She was subsequently placed in isolation at a hospital and further tests were arranged.

Upon notification of the case, the DH immediately conducted epidemiological investigations and identified her two travel companions who also developed suspected symptoms in Guangdong Province and Macao respectively. The DH, in accordance with the notification mechanism, immediately notified its Guangdong and Macao counterparts. The simulation

exercise concluded with disease control and prevention measures duly taken to prevent the possible infection and spreading of the Ebola virus in the three places.

Next year's tripartite meeting will be hosted by the Health Bureau of Macao.

