

United Christian Hospital announces a cluster of COVID-19 cases in the Hospital

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesman of United Christian Hospital (UCH) made an announcement today (December 26) regarding a cluster of COVID-19 cases in the hospital:

Further to the announcement made on December 23 on three inpatients in the Palliative Care and Medical Ward confirmed COVID-19, the hospital's infection control team has kept constant monitoring of the health of staff as well as inpatients in the ward and arranged viral tests for them. In a new round of testing, eight more female patients, aged 20 to 92 year-old, are tested preliminarily positive.

At the same time, an 83-year-old female patient was admitted to the Palliative Care and Medical Ward on December 18. Her viral test result was negative under admission screening. She was transferred to the orthopaedic ward on December 19 and discharged on December 20. She underwent viral testing in the community and was found preliminarily positive for COVID-19 on December 24. All 12 patients are currently under isolation in UCH, apart from one patient who is in critical condition, all others are in stable condition.

Regarding the cluster of COVID-19 cases in Palliative Care and Medical Ward, the hospital has arranged ward staff and other staff who have visited the ward to undergo COVID-19 tests. So far, 195 staff have been tested and a total of seven staff are tested preliminarily positive, including four nurses, one phlebotomist, one patient healthcare assistant and one contract-out cleaner. They are all transferred to the isolation ward in UCH and are in stable condition. Test results of other staff members are negative and related tests are still ongoing. The hospital infection control team is conducting contact tracing for these colleagues.

The hospital has arranged thorough cleansing and disinfection of the ward, as precautionary measures, apart from suspending compassionate visit earlier, the hospital stepped up the following infection control measures:

1. Suspend ward admission;
2. Suspend patient transfer to other wards or hospitals;
3. Stop baseline staff movement to other wards;
4. Apply stringent contact and droplet precautions;
5. Arrange repeat testing for patients and staff concerned within a particular timeframe;
6. Arrange accommodation within hospital premises for affected staff

A team of experts including Professor Yuen Kwok-yung, Chair Professor of the Department of Microbiology, University of Hong Kong and Dr Raymond Lai, Hospital Authority Chief Infection Control Officer had paid a visit to UCH this afternoon. Professor Yuen reviewed patients and staff cases, the workflow of the ward and hospital's infection control measures and commented that the infection control measures in UCH are appropriate.

Professor Yuen believed that the confirmed cases in the hospital is related to a super-spreader who are infected within the community. Besides, patients in the Palliative Care and Medical Ward have terminal illness, poor immune system and some already have severe organ failure. Patients with terminal illness may also have difficulty in breathing and hence poor mask compliance, causing further spreading of the virus.

Professor Yuen suggested that healthcare staff should put on eye protection during mouth care or feeding for patients. Although the patient's admission screening showed negative results, it is possible that it was during the incubation period. He suggested the hospital to perform another viral test for patients who show chest infections or those with worsening symptoms. He also suggested that the hospital should enhance ventilation facilities inside the ward.

The hospital immediately enhanced the infection control of respective caring procedures and reminded clinicians to arrange another viral tests for patients whose clinical conditions worsened in view of the experts' advice. The hospital has already installed air purifiers with HEPA filters inside the ward and will carefully examine the recommendations of the experts and to introduce other improvement measures.

As for the orthopedic ward case, seven female patients who were located near the confirmed patient were classified as close contacts after contact tracing. Among which, two of them were discharged and will be followed up by the Centre for Health Protection. According to the initial investigation, the staff members working in the concerned ward were equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment in accordance with infection control guidelines. No aerosol generating procedures had been performed during that period. Therefore, none of the staff members is being classified as close contacts so far, while contact tracing is still underway. The hospital has arranged tests for the patients and the staff members. So far the test results are negative. Admission to this ward has also been suspended with immediate effect and thorough cleansing and disinfection of the ward were arranged.

UCH will continue to closely monitor the health of the staff and patients and communicate with the CHP about the latest situation.