

Health Advice on the Prevention of Respiratory Tract Infections (Hong Kong MOH)

Background

- In view of a recent outbreak of febrile respiratory illness among health care staff in Prince of Wales Hospital, the Department of Health is conducting a detailed investigation with the Hospital Authority and the Hong Kong University and Chinese University of Hong Kong to identify the cause of infection. The situation will be monitored closely.
- The Department of Health has informed the World Health Organization (WHO) about the latest developments. Hong Kong is working closely with the WHO on disease control and prevention.

Advice applicable to all

- As a precautionary measure, members of the public are advised to take precautionary measures to prevent respiratory tract infections:
 - Build up good body immunity. This means taking a proper diet, having regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking
 - Maintain good personal hygiene, and wash hands after sneezing, coughing or cleaning the nose
 - Maintain good ventilation
 - Avoid visiting crowded places with poor ventilation
 - Consult their doctor promptly if they develop respiratory symptoms

For schools and pre-school institutions

- Child Care Centres / Kindergartens / Schools are advised to refer to the 'Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Child Care Centres / Kindergartens / Schools' published by the Department of Health in 2000 for general information on the prevention of communicable diseases in school and institutional settings. This is downloadable from the DH's website <http://www.info.gov.hk/dh>. Specific advice in the school and institutional setting that helps to prevent respiratory tract infections includes :
 - Cleanse used toys and furniture properly
 - Keep hands clean and wash hands properly
 - Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing
 - Wash hands when they are dirtied by respiratory secretions e.g. after sneezing
 - Use liquid soap for hand washing and disposable towel for drying hands
 - Do not share towels

For other institutional settings

- A 'Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly and People with Disabilities' published by the Department of Health is also available for general information on the prevention of communicable diseases in the

particular institutional setting. This is downloadable from the DH's website <http://www.info.gov.hk/dh>.

For health care workers in clinic setting

- There is as at date no unusual upsurge of pneumonia cases in the community.
- All clinic staff should enforce strict infection control measures appropriate for their particular setting, especially observance of good personal hygiene.
- If staff fall sick, they should report to their seniors and take sick leave as appropriate.
- Where considered necessary, for example, treating or nursing a patient with respiratory symptoms, staff may wear masks.
- The Department of Health will continue to monitor the situation of the pneumonia cases and issue advice accordingly.
- Patients with respiratory symptoms are advised to wear mask to reduce the chance of spread of the infection.

Caring for sick family members with respiratory illness

- Patients should consult a doctor if they are unwell.
- They should follow instructions given by the doctor including the use of drugs as prescribed and taking adequate rest as appropriate.
- Adhere to good personal hygiene practices.
- Ensure adequate ventilation.
- Patients should put on masks to reduce the chance of spread of infection to carers.
- Carers may also put on masks to reduce the chance of acquiring infection through the airways.

Advice to relatives visiting patients with pneumonia

- Visitors to warded patients are advised to take due precautions in infection control, e.g. wearing face mask and gowns and to wash hands thoroughly afterwards before coming into contact with other people.

Notification of infections

If unusual patterns of illnesses/sick leave in any setting are detected, please notify the respective Regional Office of the Department of Health. The contact numbers are as follows :