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19 May, 2011

Dear Doctor,

**Vigilance against Enterovirus 71 (EV71) infection and
Hand, Foot and Mouth disease (HFMD)**

I would like to urge you to be vigilant against EV71 infection and HFMD outbreaks as we have recorded an increased number of EV71 infections recently. In May 2011 (as of 18 May), the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) recorded nine cases of EV71 infection, higher than the number of cases recorded in March and April which ranged from zero to two cases. So far in 2011, the CHP has received 16 reports of EV71 infection. The patients aged from two months to seven years old. One of them who had meningoencephalitis complication passed away in February, the other patients had mild symptoms without severe complications. The CHP has also received six reports of HFMD outbreaks in institutions in May (as of 18 May) while five and one HFMD outbreaks were recorded in March and April, respectively.

HFMD is a common childhood infectious disease in Hong Kong. It occurs throughout the year but is more commonly seen during summer (May through July). In the past few years, a smaller winter peak of HFMD activity also occurred from October to December. Most outbreaks affect young children in child care centres and kindergartens. Common aetiological agents of HFMD include Coxsackie viruses, EV71 and other enteroviruses. The main symptoms of HFMD are fever, sore throat, skin rash over hands and feet, and vesicles in the oral cavity, on the tongue and palate. The incubation period is usually 3-7 days. The disease is mainly transmitted by the faecal-oral route. Direct contact with open and weeping skin vesicles may also spread the virus. A person is most contagious during the first week of illness and the infectious agent can be found in stools for weeks. Although the illness is usually self-limiting, some patients infected with EV71 virus may result in complications like myocarditis, encephalitis or poliomyelitis-like paralysis.



You may wish to refer to the “**Management of HFMD in Health Care Settings**” published by the Scientific Committee on Enteric Infections and Foodborne Diseases of CHP for information on laboratory testing and infection control measures (http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/SCEIFD_Management_of_HFMD_in_Health_Care_Settings.pdf). Cases showing severe symptoms/signs should be considered for hospitalisation for investigation and treatment.

We enlist your continual support in providing the following **health advice to parents** whose children suffer from HFMD:

- Children with HFMD should be refrained from nurseries/ kindergartens/ schools or social activities such as parties, interest classes, swimming until all vesicles have dried up and symptoms subsided;
- Seek medical advice urgently if the child develops important symptoms and signs suggesting severe illness including persistent high fever, repeated vomiting, persistent sleepiness or drowsiness or myoclonic jerks or sudden limb weakness.
- Protect other family members, especially children, from getting the infection through strict personal and environmental hygiene, including always wash hands thoroughly after changing diapers or handling respiratory secretions, and clean thoroughly toys or appliances which are contaminated by the child’s secretions with 1 in 49 diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of 5.25% bleach with 49 parts of water);
- For parents taking their unaffected children during travel, advise them to undertake similar stringent measures.

As EV71 is associated with higher risk of complications and the virus may be excreted in stools for some weeks, CHP advises children suffering from laboratory confirmed EV71 infections to **stay away from school for two additional weeks** after symptoms have subsided.

Please inform the Central Notification Office (CENO) of CHP (Telephone: 2477 2772, Fax: 2477 2770) or CENO On-line at <http://www.chp.gov.hk/ceno> when you encounter the following cases:

- **EV71 infection;**
- **Severe paediatric enterovirus infection (other than EV71 and poliovirus).**

For detailed reporting criteria, please refer to the CENO website at <https://chpceno.chp.gov.hk/casedef/casedef.pdf>. CHP will start epidemiological investigations on these cases and take appropriate control measures.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SK Chuang', written in a cursive style.

(Dr SK CHUANG)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health