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18 December 2007

To Principals / Persons-in-charge,

Vigilance against chickenpox

As Hong Kong is entering the peak season of chickenpox, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you to keep vigilance against chickenpox in your school/centre.

Chickenpox is a very common childhood infection. It is transmitted by direct person-to-person contact, through airborne droplets or airborne spread of the discharge from the respiratory tract, and indirectly from the articles freshly soiled by discharges from the infected persons' lesions. Children suffering from chickenpox may have low-grade fever, and develop skin rash on their scalp and body, which spreads to the face, arms and legs with formation of vesicles over a period of 5 days. The rashes occur mainly on the trunk and the vesicles are itchy. The vesicles dry up and form a scab in about three days and the patient usually recovers in about two to four weeks. Chickenpox is usually a mild and self-limiting disease. However, those with low body resistance are more likely to suffer from complications such as skin infection, scarlet fever, pneumonia and encephalitis. Newborn babies who develop chickenpox can result in severe generalised illness and even death. Infection in early pregnancy may be associated with congenital malformation of the foetus.

To prevent chickenpox outbreaks in your institution, the following measures are recommended:

1. Maintain good communication with parents and help them understand the need to keep children at home for rest when they develop fever and rash.
2. Encourage staff to screen for sick children before they enter the school/centre. The sick child should stay at home and be excluded from school/centre for around 1 week or until the skin lesions crusted to prevent spreading the disease to others.



3. Supervise children on personal hygiene practices especially on how to wash the hands properly with liquid soap, cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing, and proper disposal of nasal and mouth discharge.
4. Keep the environment clean and hygienic, and maintain good ventilation, as well as following the Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Child Care Centres, Kindergartens, and Schools which is available at <http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Guild-Booklet-eng.pdf>
5. Parents can approach their family doctors for further advice and information on chickenpox vaccination. About 90% of persons who receive the vaccine will acquire immunity. In other words, parents should still be aware of their children contracting chickenpox even after vaccination and take necessary precautionary measures.

If you notice an increase in the number of children with symptoms of chickenpox or an increase in the number of absentees, please inform the Central Notification Office of Centre for Health Protection (CHP) as early as possible at Fax: 2477 2770 or Tel: 2477 2772. CHP will give advice on the management of such cases and take appropriate control measures. For more information, please visit the website of CHP at <http://www.chp.gov.hk>

Yours sincerely,



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