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21 November 2008

Dear Operators/ Managers/Infection control officers of residential care homes,

### **Vigilant against Viral Gastroenteritis**

I would like to draw your attention to the prevention of viral gastroenteritis in your institution / organization as we are approaching the traditional peak season of viral gastroenteritis.

Viral gastroenteritis, commonly caused by noroviruses, is a frequent cause of outbreaks in institutions. Norovirus infection is usually mild and self-limiting yet they may result in outbreaks that are difficult to control. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever and malaise. The infection can spread through the consumption of contaminated food or direct contact with the vomitus or excreta of infected persons. Norovirus outbreaks may occur throughout the year but are known to occur more frequently in winter months.

To prevent outbreaks of acute gastroenteritis, strict personal, food and environmental hygiene with particular attention to handling of vomitus and faecal matter are very important. I would recommend you taking the following steps:

1. Remind residents and staff to maintain personal hygiene practices especially proper hand-washing using liquid soap before meals and after going to toilet.
2. Remind staff, residents and their family to maintain proper food hygiene. Ensure all food is adequately cooked especially high risk food like shellfish.
3. Train staff on the proper management and disinfection of the environment after vomiting incidents:
  - Keep residents away from the area during the cleaning process;



- Wear gloves and mask while cleaning the vomitus;
  - Use disposable towels (do not use floor mops) to wipe away all the vomitus from outside inward, before applying diluted bleach 1:49 (by adding 1 part of 5.25% sodium hypochlorite solution to 49 parts of water) to the surface and neighbouring area (say within two metres of the vomitus);
  - Leave for about 15 to 30 minutes to allow the bleach to inactivate viruses in the vomitus before rinsing the surface with water, and then leave it until dry;
  - Wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
  - Maintain good indoor ventilation.
4. Staff developing vomiting or diarrhoea should be advised to refrain from work and seek medical advice.

As daycare and residential institutions are at risk of communicable disease outbreak, I would urge you to keep vigilance against communicable diseases. The “Guideline on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly” and “Guideline on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Day Care Centre/ Home Care Services/ Home-based Training and Support Service for the Elderly and Disabled Persons” contain practical information and control measures on prevention of communicable diseases and are available at <http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/grp-elderly-tc-20070917.pdf> and [http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/grp-CSS\\_Guideline-tc-2004052100.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/grp-CSS_Guideline-tc-2004052100.pdf) respectively. If you notice an increase in the number of residents or staff with symptoms of viral gastroenteritis or other infectious diseases, please inform the Central Notification Office of CHP as early as possible at Fax: 2477 2770 or Tel: 2477 2772, so that investigation and intervention can be initiated as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr SK CHUANG)

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