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6 May 2005

To Principals / Persons-in-charge,

Prevention of Hand-foot-mouth Disease (HFMD)

Recently, we have noted an increase in HFMD activity in the community through our surveillance system at child care centres. In Hong Kong, outbreaks of HFMD tend to occur more commonly during summer and early autumn. As we enter the traditional peak season for this disease, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you on the prevention of HFMD in your institution.

HFMD is a viral infection most commonly caused by enteroviruses such as Coxsackie viruses. Young children are most susceptible to the disease. The incubation period is usually 3-5 days. It is associated with flu-like symptoms during the early stage of the infection. Fever may persist for 4-5 days. A rash may occur on the palms and soles and other parts of the body such as buttocks and thighs. Vesicles can also be found in the oral cavity, on the tongue and palate. There may be loss of appetite especially if there are painful mouth ulcers causing difficulty in swallowing. In most cases, the fever, rash and ulcers subside spontaneously in one week and full recovery is usual. Complications are uncommon. Rarely, this illness may be associated with meningitis.



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 the illness and the infectious agent can be found in stools for weeks. Strict personal hygiene is therefore of utmost importance in preventing HFMD. Those who handle nose or throat discharges, faeces and soiled articles should wash their hands promptly afterwards. Parents are advised to seek prompt medical attention if their children develop a high fever, decrease in alertness or deterioration of general condition.

To prepare for the HFMD season this year, I would recommend you taking the following steps:

1. Maintain good communication with parents and help them to understand the need to keep children at home for rest when they develop fever and rash;
2. Teach children on personal hygiene practices especially on how to wash their hands properly with liquid soap before meals and after going to toilet, cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing, and proper disposal of nasal and mouth discharge;
3. Encourage staff to screen for sick children before they enter the centre/ kindergarten. The sick children should preferably be taken home by their parents. However, if circumstances do not allow, they should be placed in areas where there is good ventilation as far as possible and separated from other children. Sick children should be kept out of school until their fever and rash have subsided and all the vesicles have dried and crusted.
4. Follow the Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Child Care Centres, Kindergartens, and Schools to keep the environment of the centre/kindergarten clean and hygienic, especially concerning cleansing of toys and toilets and management of excreta and body fluids.

If you notice an increase in the number of children with symptoms of HFMD or an increase in the number of absentees, please inform the Central Notification Office of CHP as early as possible at Fax: 24772770 or Tel: 24772772. 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> or refer to 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/Guid-Booklet-eng.pdf>

Yours sincerely,



(Dr Thomas TSANG)

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