

Management of Avian Influenza in Clinics

Clinic management should take appropriate measures to ensure maximum protection of patients and staff.

(A) Acquire an understanding of seasonal influenza / avian influenza / influenza pandemic

- INFLUENZA or 'flu' can be caused by different types of influenza viruses. It is important to differentiate the three different entities of seasonal influenza, avian influenza and influenza pandemic. Influenza spreads mainly by respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing or contact with contaminated surfaces.
 - SEASONAL INFLUENZA occurs in human populations. In Hong Kong, influenza peaks in January to March and July to August every year. The commonest circulating strains are influenza A (H1N1 and H3N2) and influenza B.
 - AVIAN INFLUENZA normally infects birds, including poultry. Possible strains include influenza A (H5, H7 and H9) viruses. Human cases of avian influenza have been reported, mostly resulting from close contact with sick birds. Efficient spread between human beings is not known.
 - INFLUENZA PANDEMIC occurs when a new viral strain emerges and spreads rapidly among the human race which does not possess immunity to the disease. The new viral strain may originate from a human influenza virus or an avian influenza virus. As large numbers of people will fall ill or die from it, great human, social and economic loss will result. Many people would not be able to work due to the sickness, having to stay at home to care for the sick, or upon Government's advice to reduce social contact. Community and economic activities will have to be scaled down.
- According to the World Health Organization, the incubation period for avian influenza H5N1 is 7 days. After being infected, persons may develop symptoms in seven days, but they may start spreading the disease one day before symptoms develop.
- The initial clinical presentation of avian influenza is like other types of influenza, which may include fever, cough, sore throat, headache and muscle ache. However, avian influenza is more often associated with a history of travel to a place with affected poultry and/or contact with sick birds or related laboratory specimens. Some avian flu patients may also present with shortness of breath and diarrhoea. Avian flu may progress to develop high fever, chest infection, lung failure, multi-organ failure and death.

(B) Get prepared for avian influenza

- Study the Hong Kong Government - Emergency Preparedness for Influenza Pandemic in Hong Kong (http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/checklist-e_flu_eng_20051105.pdf) and Influenza Pandemic Preparedness – Information Kit for Health Care Workers

(http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/grp_erib_hcw_Information_kit_7jul05.pdf) to develop in-house supplies of protective equipment and infection control guidelines.

- To better prepare for avian influenza, the clinic staff are expected to compile with the prevailing infection control guidelines issued by the Infection Control Branch of CHP as well as from the Hospital Authority.
- Readers are advised to read the infection control guidelines together with Appendix 3 of the Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Information Kit for Health Care Workers.
- Provide proper hand hygiene facilities and face masks for use by staff and patients at the clinics, as appropriate.

(C) Before Hong Kong enters pandemic stage

1. If there is a high index of suspicion of avian influenza A (H5/H7/H9) case

- ◆ ensure that the patient has put on a face mask;
- ◆ call for ambulance and transfer the patient to A&E department;
- ◆ alert A&E department and the Centre for Health Protection of Department of Health of such case;
- ◆ keep a record and contact telephone numbers of patients / accompanying persons / health care workers who share the waiting area with the affected patient; and
- ◆ carry out thorough disinfection of potentially contaminated area in the clinic before seeing next patient.

2. If a probable / confirmed patient with avian influenza (H5/H7/H9) has attended the clinic, regardless of the identity of the affected individual (this will either be informed by the hospital or CHP/DH)

- ◆ prepare a staff list (both fixed and visiting staff) and a patient list for the period when the case patient attended the clinic;
- ◆ provide the duty roster of the staff;
- ◆ prepare a floor plan, if required;
- ◆ provide records of staff's sick leave;
- ◆ provide information of patients who have contact with the case patient or have attended the clinic during the defined period for CHP to carry out necessary contact tracing;
- ◆ monitor temperature and symptoms of the staff and report to CHP if indicated;
- ◆ comply with the guidelines for disinfection; the Food & Environmental Health Department can help if necessary; and
- ◆ remind staff/patients to observe strict personal and environmental hygiene.

Please report any suspected cases of avian influenza to the Central Notification Office, Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health at Tel: 2477 2772 or by Fax: 2477 2770

May 2006