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25 August 2016

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge / Teacher,

Stay Vigilant Against Communicable Diseases in Coming School Year

As the new school year is approaching, we would like to take this opportunity to urge you to maintain vigilance against communicable diseases at child care centres, kindergartens and schools.

Chickenpox is a highly communicable viral disease, and is the most commonly reported notifiable infectious disease in Hong Kong. Seasonally, the number of chickenpox cases usually starts to rise in October and peaks in December and January. Institutional outbreaks of chickenpox occur commonly in the community with the majority in pre-primary institutions (including kindergartens, child care centres, etc.) as well as primary and secondary schools.

Dengue fever is an acute febrile viral illness characterised by high fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, rash, muscle and joint pain. The disease is transmitted by mosquito. The symptoms of first infection are usually mild, but subsequent infections from other serotypes of dengue virus may result in severe dengue and progress to circulatory failure, shock and even death. Dengue fever activity is high in our neighbouring areas, including popular tourist attractions in Southeast Asia, Guangdong and Taiwan. To prevent dengue fever, child care centres, kindergartens and schools should conduct regular inspection, eliminate any pocket of stagnant water and maintain good environmental hygiene to prevent mosquito breeding.



Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common disease in children caused by enteroviruses such as coxsackie viruses and enterovirus 71 (EV71). In Hong Kong, the usual peak season for HFMD and EV71 infection is from May to

July. A smaller winter peak also occurred from October to December in 2012 to 2014. In 2015, the summer peak season of HFMD lasted longer than usual and extended to the winter peak season. The activity only started to decline in January 2016 and returned to baseline in March 2016. The activity of HFMD started to increase again in May 2016, peaked in late June and early July and has been declining since August. As of mid-August this year, the number of reported cases of EV71 infection and severe enterovirus infections (SE) other than EV71 and poliovirus were less than that in the same period of last year. It is expected that some sporadic institutional outbreaks of HFMD may occur after the start of the new school year.

As for influenza, there were eight reported institutional influenza-like illness outbreaks affecting 44 persons in the recent four weeks (as of 20 August). Although influenza activity currently remains at low level, schools and parents should continue to stay vigilant against influenza as it can cause serious illness even in healthy children. Vaccination is a safe and effective means against serious influenza infection. The Government will provide subsidised/free vaccination to children aged between six months and under 12 years (or above but attending a primary school in Hong Kong) in 2016/17. The vaccination arrangement will start in around October/November. Please take note of the government's announcement. Parents may refer to the information provided in the CHP website

(http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/vss_info_leaflet_children_en_201606.pdf) or consult their family doctors to arrange annual seasonal influenza vaccination for their children for personal protection. More information will be provided to school in due course.

To prevent outbreaks of communicable diseases, students/children who develop skin rash, fever, acute respiratory symptoms, diarrhea or vomiting are strongly advised not to attend school and should seek medical advice. Besides, child care centres, kindergartens and schools should take measures to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, e.g., remind students/children and staff members to observe good personal, food and environmental hygiene, avoid sharing clothing and slippers among students/children, etc. For details, please refer to the “**Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Schools /Kindergartens /Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres /Child Care Centres**”, which is accessible on the website of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) at:

http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_in_schools_kindergartens_kindergartens_cum_child_care-centres_child_are_centres.pdf

If you suspect any outbreaks occurring in your institution, please report to the Central Notification Office of CHP as early as possible for prompt epidemiological investigations and outbreak control (Tel: 2477 2772; Fax: 2477 2770). Child care centres, kindergartens and schools should set up a mechanism for collecting personal particulars and contact information of students/children and staff members. They should also inform parents at the beginning of the new school year that the conditions and contact details of students/children will be released to CHP and other relevant departments for disease control purpose when necessary.

For the latest information on communicable diseases, please visit CHP's webpages below:

- Chickenpox (www.chp.gov.hk/en/content/9/24/15.html);
- Dengue fever (www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/38847.html).
- HFMD and EV71 infection (www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/16354.html) ;
and
- Influenza (www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/14843.html)

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'S K CHUANG', written in a cursive style.

(Dr. S K CHUANG)

For Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health