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25 August 2017

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 the below common communicable diseases at child care centres, kindergartens and schools.

Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a highly communicable viral disease, and is the most commonly reported notifiable infectious disease in Hong Kong. There are two seasonal peaks: the number of chickenpox cases usually starts to rise in October and peaks in December and January; while a smaller peak is also observed in June and July. 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

Dengue fever is an acute febrile viral illness with symptoms such as high fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, rash, muscle and joint pain. The disease is transmitted by mosquitoes. 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 Macau. 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

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 and a smaller peak may also occur from October to December. In the 2017 summer peak, the HFMD activity started to increase in June, peaked in July and returned to baseline level in mid-August. As of late August this year, the number of cases of EV71 infection recorded was higher than and that of severe enterovirus infections (SE) other than EV71 and poliovirus was the same as 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.

Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever (SF) is a bacterial infection caused by Group A Streptococcus. It mostly affects children. SF is transmitted through either respiratory droplets or direct contact with infected respiratory secretions. The local SF activity is usually higher from November to March and from May to June. It is expected to increase after the start of the new school year.

Seasonal influenza

Influenza viruses mainly spread through droplets when infected people cough, sneeze or talk. The infection may also spread by direct contact with the secretions of infected persons. Symptoms may include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle pain, fatigue and headache; some may also have vomiting and diarrhoea. The surveillance data of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) showed that the local influenza activity has continued to decrease in the past few weeks, but some surveillance parameters have not yet returned to the baseline levels recorded during non-season periods. 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 2017/18. 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/en/view_content/18877.html) 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 CHP at: http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_in_schools_kindergartens_kindergartens_cum_child_care-centres_child_care_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);
- Scarlet fever (http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/23359.html); and
- Influenza (www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/14843.html).

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'S K CHUANG', is centered on the page.

(Dr. S K CHUANG)

For Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health