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Dear Doctors,

**Vigilance against Middle East Respiratory Syndrome**

Further to our letter to you dated 12 June 2014, we would like to provide you with the latest situation on Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 2 October 2014, a total of 853 laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with MERS-Coronavirus, including at least 301 deaths, have been reported worldwide. Among these cases, over 97% were confirmed in nine Middle East countries, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) (732), United Arab Emirates (69), Jordan (11), Qatar (7), Iran (5), Kuwait (3), Oman (2), Lebanon (1), and Yemen (1). For the remaining 22 imported or import-related cases reported outside Middle East, all had links to Middle East, either through recent travel to the region, or exposure to a patient who acquired the infection in the region.

You may wish to know that Austria reported its first case of MERS to WHO on 30 September 2014, involving a 29-year-old female citizen of KSA. This patient travelled to Austria on a flight from Doha, Qatar on 22 September. She had symptoms of upper respiratory infection and fever prior to arrival in Austria. She was admitted to a local hospital on 26 September and was laboratory confirmed on 29 September. Subsequently, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) received notification from WHO on 2 October that a Hong Kong resident sat within two rows from the patient on the same flight of the patient on 22 September and was classified as a close contact. This 37-year-old man, who is a tour group leader, is currently self-isolated in Poland and remains asymptomatic. There were 42 tour group members who travelled with him but were not classified as close contact of the patient. They came back to Hong Kong from Poland on 4 October as scheduled. As a precautionary measure, the CHP has put them under medical surveillance upon arrival in Hong Kong and will continue to monitor their condition.



In its recent meeting of the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee regarding MERS, WHO noted that, the number of cases has fallen since the April upswing. Moreover, cases continue to appear sporadically with no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission in communities. Nonetheless, the WHO reiterated the importance to continue strengthening infection prevention control practices in healthcare facilities and reminded healthcare professionals to be aware of the risk of MERS infection among pilgrims going for Hajj which is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, KSA.

So far, no human cases of MERS have been detected in Hong Kong. With the annual pilgrimage of Hajj underway in early October, the CHP had liaised with local groups organising pilgrimage to Mecca and provided health advice on MERS to the participants. We have asked them to seek medical attention promptly if they present with symptoms during Hajj or the two weeks after their return. Any suspected cases fulfilling both the clinical and epidemiological criteria of MERS (<https://ceno.chp.gov.hk/casedef/casedef.pdf>) should be referred to public hospitals for further management and reported to the Central Notification Office (CENO) of CHP via fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or CENO On-line (<http://ceno.chp.gov.hk/>) for further investigation. Please also call our Medical Control Officer at 7116 3300 a/c 9179 outside office hours for prompt investigation. In addition, please find the infection control guidelines for MERS for health professionals at the following link: ([http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/interim\\_recommendations.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/interim_recommendations.pdf)).

Thank you for your ongoing support in combating communicable diseases.

Yours faithfully,



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