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Dear Medical Superintendent,

**Unusual increase in number of hepatitis A infection among men who have sex with men who were positive for Human Immunodeficiency Virus**

I would like to draw your attention to an unusual increased number of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection among men who have sex with men (MSM) who are positive for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV+), and to remind doctors of a comprehensive assessment for patients with HAV infection and remain vigilant against this disease.

An unusual increase in the number of hepatitis A cases affecting HIV+ MSM attendees of the DH's Integrated Treatment Centre (ITC) had been detected since August 2016, with 0-3 cases recorded every month as compared to generally zero to two per year from 2006 to 2015. Retrospective analysis of laboratory information revealed that the viruses from hepatitis A cases affecting HIV+ MSM attendees of the DH's Integrated Treatment Centre (ITC) with onset since September 2015 were shown to belong to two genetically distinguishable groups within genotype 1A. A total of 13 cases were recorded from September 2015 to 2017 as of end-January. Epidemiological investigations revealed that all patients were men aged from 26 to 48 (median = 32.5 years old). All cases were stable and there was no fatality.

Epidemiological investigations so far have not identified a common food or water source among these cases. The epidemiological and laboratory investigations suggest that male person-to-person sexual transmission may have accounted for this outbreak. As a control measure of the hepatitis A outbreak, CHP is planning to arrange one-off hepatitis A vaccination for MSM attending designated public clinical services, including ITC, AIDS Clinical Service of Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Infectious Disease Special Medical Clinic of Princess Margaret Hospital, as well as Social Hygiene Clinics.



HAV infection may be asymptomatic but for symptomatic patients, the clinical presentation is characterised by poor appetite, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea,

fever, upper abdominal discomfort, jaundice and tea-coloured urine. The illness may last for a few weeks but may rarely take months to resolve. Unlike hepatitis B and C, hepatitis A infection does not cause chronic liver disease and is rarely fatal, but it can cause debilitating symptoms and fulminant hepatitis, which is associated with high mortality.

HAV is usually transmitted by faecal-oral route either through contaminated drinks or food such as shellfish, or directly from close personal contact with an infected household member or sex partner. Recent hepatitis A outbreaks among MSM population have also been recorded in overseas areas such as Taiwan and some European countries. Population at increased risk of acquiring HAV infection includes:

- Persons with clotting factors disorders receiving plasma-derived replacement clotting factors
- Travelers to countries with high or intermediate endemicity of HAV infection
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs
- People with close contact of patient with hepatitis A
- People with possible occupational exposure to HAV

For patients with hepatitis A, please advise them to observe hygiene at all times to prevent further spreading of the disease. From onset of illness for 2 weeks or until 7 days after the appearance of jaundice, it is advisable to wear gloves and protective gowns when handling soiled materials by the patient.

Doctors are reminded to assess patients with suspected or confirmed Hepatitis A comprehensively, taking into account of populations at increased risk of acquiring HAV infection. If you encounter cases fulfilling the reporting criteria of viral hepatitis, please report the case to the Central Notification Office (CENO) of the CHP by fax (2477 2770), by phone (2477 2772), or via the CENO On-line website ([https://cdis.chp.gov.hk/CDIS\\_CENO\\_ONLINE/ceno.html](https://cdis.chp.gov.hk/CDIS_CENO_ONLINE/ceno.html)). Please draw the attention of the healthcare professionals and supporting staff in your institution/ working with you to the above. Thank you for your ongoing support in combating communicable diseases in Hong Kong.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. SK CHUANG)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection  
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