

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (26) in DH SEB CD/8/50/1 Pt.2

November 13, 2017

Dear Medical Superintendent,

Increase in Scarlet Fever Activity

We would like to inform you that the activity of scarlet fever (SF) in Hong Kong has been increasing in the past two weeks, and solicit your support in the prevention of SF.

The weekly number of SF reported to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has increased from 37 in the week ending October 28, 2017 to 61 and 66 in that ending November 4 and November 11 respectively. Three institutional outbreaks of SF in kindergartens were reported from November 1 – 11, with a total of 10 children affected.

In the first 10 months of this year, 1,682 SF cases have been recorded as compared with 948 and 1,062 cases recorded in the same period in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The epidemiological and clinical features of the cases recorded in 2017 were largely similar to those in previous years. Among the 1,682 cases, there were 977 males and 705 females with ages ranging from two months to 43 years (median: five years). The majority (95.5%) of the cases affected children aged below 10 years. 611 (36.3%) cases required hospitalisation, with one case requiring admission to intensive care unit. There were no fatal cases recorded in 2017 (as of November 11).

While SF occurred throughout the year locally, there was a seasonal pattern for SF in Hong Kong with higher activity observed from May to June and from November to March in the past few years. Based on past epidemiological pattern, we expect that the SF activity will remain at a higher level in the coming few months.



SF is a bacterial infection caused by Group A Streptococcus (GAS). The streptococcal bacteria are transmitted through the respiratory route or direct contact with infected respiratory secretions. The incubation period ranges from one to three days. SF classically presents with fever, sore throat, red and swollen tongue (known as strawberry tongue), and erythematous rash characterised by a sandpaper texture. The diagnosis of

SF mainly relies on clinical features. The illness is usually clinically mild but can be complicated by localised extension of infection leading to otitis media, mastoiditis, sinusitis or peritonsillar abscess. Rare and serious complications include acute rheumatic fever, glomerulonephritis and toxic shock syndrome.

GAS infections can be treated by appropriate antibiotics effectively. Early use of antibiotics in SF patients will prevent clinical deterioration and complications. Antibiotic treatment also shortens the period of infectivity and will prevent transmission of GAS within 24 hours of treatment. Of note, GAS with resistance to erythromycin is known to be common in Hong Kong. If you suspect SF, empirical treatment with antibiotics belonging to the penicillin group or first generation cephalosporin should be considered, and antibiotics belonging to the macrolide group (e.g. erythromycin) would not be appropriate.

We would also like to seek the assistance of your staff in providing the following health advice to your patients:

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly;
- Wash hands when they are dirtied by respiratory secretions, e.g. after sneezing;
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and mouth discharge properly;
- Keep good ventilation; and
- Patients who are suffering from SF should not go to schools or child care centres until they fully recover.

In addition, please remind your clinical staff to report any suspected cases of SF to the Central Notification Office (CENO) of the CHP via fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or CENO On-line (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.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. Albert AU)
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health