Dear Doctor,

**Rise in *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infections in Hong Kong**

I would like to inform you that the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) has detected a rise in *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infections recently, possibly signalling the beginning of an active phase.

In the past, cyclical high activity of *M. pneumoniae* has been recorded every three to four years in Hong Kong, with the last period of high activity occurring in 2005 - 2006. The monthly number of positive detections by serology for *M. pneumoniae* ranged from three to 106 per month during 2001 - 2009. We observed a higher number of positive serology samples in May and June this year with monthly detections of 68 and 97 respectively. Most detections came from people aged five to 14 years.

Infections caused by *M. pneumoniae* usually manifest as a respiratory illness, including pneumonia. *M. pneumoniae* is transmitted through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of infected people especially when they cough and sneeze. The incubation period is about three weeks (range: 1 – 4 weeks). Onset is gradual and common symptoms include fever, malaise, headache, chills, dry cough and sore throat. The majority of patients present with upper respiratory tract infections and patients usually recovered fully. Children and young adults are mostly affected. Transmission may result in spread in families, schools or institutions. Diagnosis is based on a rise in antibody titres between acute and convalescent sera.

About 5 - 10% of the patients may develop pneumonia which is usually mild and rarely requires hospitalisation. It is recognised as one of the most common causes of community-acquired pneumonia in otherwise healthy patients younger than 40 years. The highest rate of infection is in individuals aged 5 - 20 years. Treatment with antibiotics such as erythromycin, clarithromycin or azithromycin is effective. The pneumonia often resolves without any serious complications.
There is no vaccine against *M. pneumoniae*. As with any respiratory disease, good personal hygiene and infection control practices can effectively prevent transmission of *M. pneumoniae*. Members of the public are reminded to take the following measures to prevent influenza and other respiratory illnesses:

- To build up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking;
- To maintain good personal hygiene, such as:
  - Keep hands clean and wash hands properly.
  - Wash hands with liquid soap promptly if they are contaminated by respiratory tract secretions, e.g., after sneezing or coughing.
  - Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
  - Always wrap nasal and mouth discharges with tissue paper, and dispose of the tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin.
  - Wear mask when symptoms of respiratory tract infection or fever develop, refrain from work or school and seek medical advice promptly; and
- To maintain good ventilation of indoor areas and avoid visiting crowded places with poor ventilation.

The CHP will continue to monitor the situation. You are also reminded to report outbreaks of respiratory illnesses occurring in institutional settings to our Central Notification Office (Tel: 2477-2772; Fax: 2477-2770; CENO On-line at http://www.chp.gov.hk/ceso) for prompt epidemiological investigations and control measures.

Yours faithfully,

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