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2 February 2005

Dear Doctor,

Media reports of meningococcal infection in Mainland China

I wish to draw your attention to the recent reports of meningococcal infection in Mainland China.

According to the Ministry of Health, People's Republic of China, a total of 258 meningococcal infections, including 16 deaths, has been reported in the Mainland in January 2005. This means an excess of 94 cases as compared with that in the same period last year and 43 cases as compared with the preceding month, i.e., December 2004. The infection has been found in many provinces and Anhui(安徽), Henan(河南), Hebei(河北), Jiangsu(江蘇) and Sichuan(四川) have reported the highest number of cases. Anhui Province has reported a total of 62 cases including 6 deaths. Mostly are adolescents aged between 13 and 18 and found to be due to serotype C. As for Guangdong Province, 11 cases have been reported in January this year. All are adult cases and are due to serotype A Meningococcus.

In Hong Kong, meningococcal infection is a statutorily notifiable disease with between three to fourteen cases reported in recent years. In 2004, there were four sporadic cases. In Jan 2005, there was one case which has no travel history.

Meningococcal infection is an acute bacterial disease, characterized by sudden onset of intense headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, photophobia and stiff neck. Serious cases may have convulsions and coma. It is transmitted by direct contact, including droplets from nose and throat of infected persons or carriers. The incubation period varies from 2-10 days, commonly 3-4 days. Patients typically respond to antibiotic therapy. The survival rate is over 90% if the diagnosis is made promptly and antibiotics given early. Some recovered patients may have long term neurological sequelae such as deafness and mental retardation.



For close contacts of those with meningococcal infections, medical surveillance and early administration of chemoprophylaxis are important for prevention of disease. When indicated, Ciprofloxacin, Ceftriaxone or Rifampicin can be used for chemoprophylaxis and should be administered as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours after the case is identified. Close contacts at risk of developing meningococcal infections include the following groups: (1) household members, (2) day care centre contacts, (3) anyone directly exposed to the patient's oral secretions, (4) those who frequently sleep or eat in the same dwelling as the case.

There are two types of meningococcal vaccines available in Hong Kong, namely bivalent (covering serotypes A and C) and quadrivalent (covering serotypes A, C, W-135 and Y) vaccines. The vaccination comprises a single injection administered from the age of 18 months onwards. At present, we do not have compelling evidence to recommend all travelers getting meningococcal vaccinations. Travellers to areas with high incidence of meningococcal infection may receive meningococcal vaccinations for personal protection. Meningococcal vaccinations need 7-14 days before it works.

Please be reminded to report suspected or confirmed cases to the Central Notification Office of CHP (Tel: 24772772 or Fax: 24772770) during office hours or Medical Control Officer (71163300 call 9179) outside office hours.

A hotline (tel.: 2575 1221) has been set up to answer public enquiries. General advice to the public for prevention of diseases transmitted by respiratory droplets include:

- Observe personal hygiene especially the practice of hand washing
- 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.
- Travellers to affected areas should avoid going to crowded places to minimize the risk of infection, to wear surgical masks and shorten their visits if such visits were unavoidable.
- Travellers returning from affected areas should consult doctors promptly if they feel unwell after the trip and inform doctors of the travel history.

Yours faithfully,



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