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Dear Doctor,

Updated global and local situation of influenza activity

I would like to update you on the recent upsurge in influenza activity in some countries/areas in Europe and North America.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the winter influenza season is under way. Both community and hospital data showed that the influenza activity continued to increase across the UK. The influenza-like illness (ILI) consultation rates have increased above baseline levels. Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 (i.e., human swine influenza) and influenza B were the predominant circulating viruses. From September 6, 2010 to January 5, 2011, 50 fatal cases have been verified by the UK'S Health Protection Agency as related to influenza infection. Of these verified fatal cases, 45 have been associated with influenza A (H1N1) 2009 infection and 5 with influenza B infection. The majority of the fatal cases did not receive the influenza vaccine.

In Europe, increasing trends of influenza activity were reported, indicating the start of the winter influenza season. Eastern countries still experienced influenza activity of low intensity, but some western countries already reported medium intensity. Similar to the UK, influenza A (H1N1) 2009 and influenza B viruses were the predominant circulating viruses in Europe. So far, the circulating viruses detected have been similar to the current vaccine viruses.

In the United States, influenza activity is increasing and now is higher than expected for this time of the year, with influenza A (H3N2) and influenza B viruses predominating. In Canada, the overall influenza activity continued to increase with influenza A (H3N2) predominating.

ILI rates are beginning to increase in temperate countries of Asia as well. Mainland China has noted slight increases recently in the northern part, with influenza A (H3N2) virus predominating. South Korea, Japan and Taiwan have also noted increasing rates of ILI with influenza A (H1N1) 2009



predominating. The influenza activity in Singapore has remained at a low level.

Locally, the latest surveillance data showed that the influenza activity still remained at a low level. In the past four weeks (December 5, 2010 – January 1, 2011), the average ILI consultation rate among sentinel private doctors ranged from 39.8 to 46.2 (per 1,000 consultations) and that among general out-patients clinics (GOPCs) ranged from 2.4 to 2.9 (per 1,000 consultations). The weekly number of influenza isolates detected by the Public Health Laboratory Centre of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) in the past four weeks ranged from 18 – 47. Among the 128 influenza isolates detected in the past four weeks, 42 (32.8%) were seasonal influenza A (H3N2) virus, 38 (29.7%) were influenza A (H1N1) 2009 virus and 36 (28.0%) were seasonal influenza B virus. The remaining 12 influenza A viruses were not typed.

The influenza activity in Hong Kong is expected to pick up some time during the next few weeks as our winter influenza season usually occurs between January and March. As of January 2, 2011, more than 303,000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccines were administered to specified target groups under the Government's Influenza Vaccination Programme and Subsidy Schemes, which was about 30% lower than that in previous years. We would like to solicit your support to advise target groups to make use of the last opportunity to receive influenza vaccination before arrival of the winter influenza peak.

You may wish to refer to the Flu Express at the CHP website (<http://www.chp.gov.hk>) for updated information on influenza activities. 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: <http://www.chp.gov.hk/ceno>) for prompt epidemiological investigations and control measures.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. S K Chuang)

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