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Dear Doctor,

Update on Influenza Activity in Hong Kong

Hong Kong entered the winter flu season in mid-January 2011. Most recent surveillance data showed that the local influenza activity continued to increase. The Public Health Laboratory Centre of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) has detected marked increase in the number of influenza detections recently. A total of 880 influenza detections were recorded last week (ending February 5, 2011), as compared with 149, 181 and 519 in the weeks ending January 15, January 22 and January 29, 2011 respectively. The majority (91%) of influenza viruses isolated in the recent two weeks were influenza A (H1N1) 2009 (i.e. human swine influenza), followed by influenza B (5%) and influenza A (H3N2) (4%).

Influenza-like-illness (ILI) consultation rates at sentinel government out-patient clinics and private doctors remained at a high level. ILI consultation rates at sentinel private doctors for the week ending January 29 was 71.3 per 1,000 consultations while the corresponding figure for the preceding week was 65.8. The ILI consultation rates at government out-patient clinics were 8.0 per 1,000 consultations for the above two weeks. The number of ILI outbreaks reported from schools and institutions also climbed from 18 in the week ending January 15 to 59 and 55 in the weeks ending January 22 and January 29 respectively.

The CHP has set up a new surveillance mechanism in collaboration with the Hospital Authority (HA) and private hospitals to monitor influenza associated deaths and admissions to Intensive Care Units (ICU) since January 24, 2011. In a 15-day period from January 24 to February 7, 2011, there were 47 ICU patients (including eight deaths) with laboratory confirmed influenza in HA hospitals. For the same period, there was one ICU admission associated with influenza recorded in private hospitals. The above 48 ICU cases involved



28 males and 20 females, with ages ranging from 21 months to 76 years (median: 51.5 years). About 60% of these cases had known chronic diseases predisposing to more serious illnesses from influenza. Less than 5% of them were known to have received the seasonal influenza vaccine.

We would like to solicit your support to advise target groups to receive influenza vaccination as soon as possible to protect their health. Members of the public are reminded to take precautionary measures against influenza, including maintaining good personal as well as environmental hygiene; building up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking. Patients having a fever or flu symptoms should observe for signs of more serious disease or deterioration. Please remind them or their caregivers to consult a doctor immediately if they develop symptoms suggestive of more severe illness, such as persistent high fever not responding to medication, severe vomiting, decreased conscious level, breathing difficulties or convulsion, etc.

You may wish to refer to the Flu Express and the Influenza Daily Situation Update 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)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
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