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3 November 2011

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

### Stay Vigilant against Chickenpox

I would like to solicit your continuous support in prevention and control of chickenpox in your school/centre as recent surveillance data from the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) has shown a gradual increase in chickenpox activity in Hong Kong.

Chickenpox is a very common childhood infection. It occurs all year round but is usually more active in winter months. CHP has received 862 cases of chickenpox notifications in October, compared with 568 in September. The weekly number of notification of chickenpox has been increased from 131 in week 40 (the week starting on 25 September) to 159, 198, 203 and 250 in the subsequent four weeks.

Chickenpox is transmitted by direct person-to-person contact, through airborne droplets or airborne spread of the discharge from the respiratory tract, and indirectly from the articles freshly soiled by discharges from the infected persons' lesions. Children suffering from chickenpox may develop low-grade fever and skin rash on their scalp and body, which spreads to the face, arms and legs with formation of vesicles over a period of 5 days. The rashes occur mainly on the trunk and the vesicles are itchy. The vesicles dry up and form a scab in about three days and the patient usually recovers in about two to four weeks.

Although chickenpox is usually a mild and self-limiting disease, those with low body resistance are more likely to suffer from complications such as skin infection, scarlet fever, pneumonia and encephalitis. Newborn babies who develop chickenpox can result in severe generalised illness and even death. Infection in early pregnancy may associate with congenital malformation of the foetus.



To prevent chickenpox outbreaks in your institution, the following measures are recommended:

1. In case of outbreak, maintain good communication with parents by issuing a letter/notice to keep them updated of the disease and outbreak situation and to appeal for their understanding and cooperation on the need to keep children at home for rest when they develop fever and rash.
2. Encourage staff to screen for sick children before they enter the school/centre. The sick child should stay at home and be excluded from school/centre for around one week or until the skin lesions crusted to prevent spreading the disease to others.
3. Supervise children on personal hygiene practices especially on how to wash the hands properly with liquid soap, cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing, and proper disposal of nasal and mouth discharge.
4. Keep the environment clean and hygienic, and maintain good ventilation, as well as following the “Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Schools/ Kindergartens / Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres / Child Care Centres (August 2011 Edition)” which is available at ([http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/School\\_full\\_eng\\_20110822.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/School_full_eng_20110822.pdf)).
5. Parents can approach their family doctors for further advice and information on chickenpox vaccination. About 90% of persons who receive the vaccine will acquire immunity. In other words, parents should still be aware of their children contracting chickenpox even after vaccination and take necessary precautionary measures.

If you notice an increase in the number of children with symptoms of chickenpox or an increase in the number of absentees, please inform the Central Notification Office of CHP as early as possible at Fax: 2477 2770 or Tel: 2477 2772. CHP will give advice on the management of such cases and take appropriate control measures. For more information, please visit the website of CHP at <http://www.chp.gov.hk>.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr SK CHUANG)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection  
Department of Health