Health risks and prevention of seasonal influenza avian influenza influenza pandemic
Seasonal Influenza

Health risk

Seasonal influenza (flu) is an acute illness of the respiratory tract caused by influenza viruses. In Hong Kong, it is usually more common in periods from January to March and from July to August.

For healthy individuals, seasonal influenza is usually self-limiting with recovery within several days to a week. However, it can be a serious illness to persons with weak immunity, young children and elderly persons, and may be complicated by bronchitis, pneumonia or even death in the most serious cases.

Measures to take

Seasonal influenza vaccination is safe and effective in preventing seasonal influenza and its complications, and can reduce influenza related hospitalization and death. As serious influenza can occur even in healthy individuals, members of the public except those with known contraindications should receive seasonal influenza vaccine for personal protection. It is recommended that vaccination should be received well before the arrival of winter season, preferably in autumn every year, because the body will takes about two to four weeks to develop sufficient level of antibodies to protect against influenza virus infection.

Other preventive measures of influenza include observing good personal and environmental hygiene; washing hands with liquid soap and water properly, maintaining good indoor ventilation, and avoiding crowded or poorly ventilated public places during peak season of influenza.

Members of the public should put on a surgical mask if they develop flu symptoms, such as fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, headache, fatigue and muscle pain and should have adequate rest, drink plenty of water, refrain from work or school, and seek medical advice if symptoms persist or deteriorate. In addition, members of the public should also maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke, and avoid alcohol consumption and overstress.
Avian Influenza

Health risk

Avian influenza (AI) is caused by those influenza viruses that mainly affect birds and poultry, such as chickens or ducks. These viruses are distinct from human seasonal influenza viruses. Since the AI viruses does not commonly infect human, there is little or no immune protection against them in the human population. People mainly become infected with AI through direct contact with infected birds and poultry (live or dead), their droppings or contaminated environments. Human-to-human transmission is inefficient. People in direct contact with live poultry are more susceptible to contracting AI. Elderly persons, children and people with chronic illness have a higher risk of developing complications such as bronchitis and chest infection. AI in human causes a wide range of flu-like symptoms with or without diarrhoea, and may progress rapidly to respiratory failure, multi-organ failure or even death in serious cases.

Measures to take

To prevent contracting AI in humans, members of the public should observe good personal and environmental hygiene; avoid contact with birds, poultry (live or dead) and their droppings; and cook poultry and eggs thoroughly before eating.

Travelling

When travelling overseas, avoid contacting birds and poultry (live or dead) or their droppings, and visiting poultry markets and farms. Travellers if feeling unwell when outside Hong Kong, especially if having a fever or cough, should wear a surgical mask and inform the hotel staff or tour leader and seek medical advice at once. After returning from affected areas with AI outbreaks, travellers should wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease if they have flu-like symptoms, consult doctors promptly and inform the doctor of their travel.
Influenza Pandemic

Health risk
Influenza pandemic occurs roughly every 10 to 50 years and may strike anytime. It is caused by emergence global spread of a novel influenza virus originated from animal influenza virus undergoing major genetic changes resulting in efficient human-to-human transmission. The human population has low or no immunity against the emerging pandemic influenza virus. Influenza pandemic is usually associated with a great number of cases, higher severity of illness, a higher death toll and consequently greater social and economic disruption.

Measures to take
When a pandemic strikes, it may not be possible to totally eliminate the risk of infection, but one can reduce the risk by stepping up good personal hygiene practices; avoiding crowded places; and wearing a surgical mask when taking care of the sick, visiting a clinic or developing flu-like symptoms. Members of the public should also refraining from work or school when having symptoms of influenza. Pay attention to and comply with the guidelines issued by the Government in respect of travelling, port health control and suspension of public events, etc. Government will make timely announcements and give more specific advice to the public on measures to take in the event of a pandemic.

The Centre for Health Protection Website
www.chp.gov.hk

24-Hour Health Education Hotline of the Department of Health
2833 0111

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