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Dear Doctor,

### **High Influenza Activity in Hong Kong**

We would like to inform you that the current influenza activity in Hong Kong remains high. The latest surveillance data showed that the influenza activity has further increased in the past few weeks in Hong Kong, after its peak activity in late February. The weekly number of influenza virus detections at the Public Health Laboratory Centre (PHLC) increased from 199 for the week ending April 14, 2012 to 852 for the week ending May 19, 2012.

The number of institutional influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks increased from 29 to 43 during the past four weeks (week ending April 28 to week ending May 19). Similarly, the average ILI consultation rates among sentinel general outpatient clinics and private practitioners also increased from 5.3 and 40.6 for the week ending April 21 to 8.2 and 56.2 for the week ending May 12 respectively.

Hong Kong entered the influenza season in mid-January 2012. Influenza B was the predominant circulating strain in the early phase of the 2011/12 influenza season. By mid-March, the influenza B virus activity subsided while the influenza A(H3N2) virus started to pick up. During the past six weeks, 89.5% of the circulating influenza viruses were the influenza A (H3N2) virus, which was followed by influenza B (9.4%) and influenza A (H1N1) 2009 (0.7%) viruses.

The current circulating influenza A(H3N2) virus is antigenically related but not identical to the current vaccine strain, A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)-like virus. Separately, the circulating influenza B viruses belonged to two lineages, the Victoria and Yamagata lineage. The latest laboratory data showed that the Yamagata lineage accounts for around 70-80% of the circulating influenza B viruses. As compared with influenza B viruses of Victoria lineage, influenza B viruses of the Yamagata lineage are antigenically less similar to the current vaccine strain B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus. Though the match is less than optimal, studies have demonstrated some degree of cross protection with the available influenza vaccine against current circulating strains.



CHP has collaborated with the Hospital Authority (HA) and private hospitals to enhance surveillance during the peak influenza season about cases with influenza infection who required intensive care unit (ICU) admissions or died since January 13, 2012. From January 13 to noon, May 21, there were 182 cases (including 106 deaths) with ICU admissions or deaths with laboratory-confirmed influenza.

Influenza can cause medical complications, especially among vulnerable people such as the elderly, young children and those with chronic medical conditions. Influenza vaccination offers protection against influenza-related complications in these groups. Members of the public are reminded to take the following measures to prevent influenza and other respiratory illnesses:

- To build up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking;
- To maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- To wash hands after sneezing, coughing or cleaning the nose;
- To maintain good ventilation;
- To avoid visiting crowded places with poor ventilation; and
- Children with acute febrile illness should not attend school till 48 hours post-defervescence.

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)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection  
Department of Health