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14 March 2024

Dear Doctors in the Primary Care Directory,

**Invitation to join the Sentinel Surveillance System
based at Clinics of Private Medical Practitioners**

We are writing to invite eligible private medical practitioners (PMPs) to become our sentinel partners under the Sentinel Surveillance System of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP), the Department of Health.

The Sentinel Surveillance System based at the clinics of PMPs was established in 1997. With invaluable support from our sentinel partners, it has since developed into a comprehensive and adaptable platform for tracking the trend of various infectious diseases in the community including **influenza-like illness (ILI)**, **hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD)**, **acute diarrhoeal diseases (ADD)**, **acute conjunctivitis (ACJ)**, and also **COVID-19** which was added subsequent to the pandemic. The Sentinel Surveillance System consists of two components, namely (a) submission of anonymous aggregate data on consultation rate of the diseases under surveillance on a weekly basis by PMPs; and (b) specimen collection from the patients by PMPs for laboratory testing. You may refer to the enclosed Annex for more details.

The strength of the Sentinel Surveillance System lies in its ability to collect valuable information from our partners, allowing for better understanding of infectious diseases under surveillance, issuing early warning to the public and health care professionals, as well as detecting unusual community outbreaks and implementing timely control measures. As one reflects upon the scale and global consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, surveillance system is undoubtedly an indispensable tool in combating infectious diseases and public health protection.

In order to enhance the sensitivity and representativeness of the system, we would like to invite PMPs fulfilling the following criteria to become our sentinel partners:

- i. provide primary care to persons of all ages in the community in the private sector; and
- ii. may encounter patients in their practices who present with symptoms of the diseases under our surveillance: ILI, HFMD, ADD, ACJ and COVID-19.



Once you have become our sentinel partner, you will receive weekly reports containing collated and synthesized data, be able to provide laboratory testing service for free to your patients for the conditions under our surveillance, and have access to relevant aggregate statistics of the diseases and their trends.

Please render your support to us by becoming our sentinel partner and return the completed reply slip by email (sentinel@dh.gov.hk) or fax (2712 3659). Should you have enquiries related to the surveillance system, please feel free to contact our support hotline at 2125 1000 during office hour and we will be delighted to provide further information.

Your participation in the Sentinel Surveillance System is important to help provide invaluable information in public health as we strive to build a more resilient and healthier future for the community. Thank you very much for your support in advance and we look forward to receiving your favourable reply.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr KH KUNG)
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health



Annex

Sentinel Surveillance System based at Private Medical Practitioners Information Sheet

What is the Sentinel Surveillance System?

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health maintains a Sentinel Surveillance System based at the clinics of private medical practitioners (PMPs) for monitoring the activities of selected infectious diseases in the community including influenza-like illness (ILI), hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD), acute diarrhoeal diseases (ADD), acute conjunctivitis (ACJ) and COVID-19. Under this system, participating doctors can collect clinical specimens for laboratory testing at the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) of the CHP.

What is required to be a sentinel partner?

We welcome any interested PMPs who: -

- i. provide primary care to the public of all age groups in the private sector, and
- ii. may see patients presenting with the diseases under surveillance:
ILI, HFMD, ADD, ACJ and COVID-19.

What does a sentinel partner do?

There are two components to the system:

- i. Submission of anonymous aggregate data on consultation rate of the diseases/ conditions under surveillance on a weekly basis; and
- ii. Specimen collection from patients who present with symptoms of the diseases/ conditions under surveillance for laboratory testing.

(a) Data on consultation rates

Case definitions of the diseases under surveillance:

ILI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever > 38°C, and• Cough or sore throat
HFMD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever, and• Small discrete papulovesicular lesions in oral cavity, and• Sparse grayish vesicles surrounded by erythematous base on hands or feet
ADD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acute watery diarrhea (passage of ≥ 3 loose or watery stools in 24 hours), and• Non-infectious causes excluded
ACJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conjunctival inflammation of possible infective origin
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 (either by PCR or RAT in the past 10 days)

The requested data includes the number of patients diagnosed to have any of the five disease conditions listed above and the total number of consultations per day. All the data to be submitted is in the form of aggregate numbers. No personal particulars of patients are required. Sentinel partners can submit the data to the CHP through an online platform of the Communicable Disease Information System, or they may also submit by fax on a weekly basis. For the online platform, the login ID and password will be the same as that for CENO On-line for reporting statutorily notifiable diseases, and a sentinel surveillance account will be activated after joining the system.

(b) Specimen collection for laboratory testing

Sentinel partners are encouraged to take the following specimens from patients diagnosed to have the diseases/ conditions under surveillance:

ILI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throat swab ± nasal swab for virology <p>Sentinel partners are encouraged to collect <u>history of seasonal influenza vaccination</u> and <u>chronic disease status</u> from ILI patients with specimens collected for estimation of vaccine effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine.</p>
HFMD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stool sample for virology (preferred), or Throat swab for virology, or Rectal swab for virology
ADD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stool sample for bacteriology
ACJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Left and right eye swabs for bacteriology, and Throat swab for virology

****Specimens should be taken within three days of disease onset.***

Specimen collection service is generally available from Monday to Friday. ***There is no limit on the number of specimens to be sent per day.*** Sentinel partners can call the CHP's contract-out courier to collect the specimens and deliver to the PHLSB for laboratory tests, and the test results will be faxed to their clinics once available. All services are free-of-charge.

How do I join?

Interested PMPs can complete the enclosed reply slip and return to the CHP by email (sentinel@dh.gov.hk) or fax (2712 3659). Please feel free to contact us at 2125 2241 for any enquiries.



Reply Slip for Joining the Sentinel Surveillance System

(Fax: 2712 3659, email: sentinel@dh.gov.hk)

I am interested in participating in the Sentinel Surveillance System of the
Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health.

Name: _____

Qualifications: _____

Hong Kong Medical Council registration number: _____

Name of practice group (if applicable): _____

Contact tel. no.: _____

Email: _____

(For correspondence and receiving weekly reports)

Preferred mode of data submission: Online ☐ OR Fax ☐

Clinic 1

Clinic name: _____

Address: _____

Contact person: _____

Tel. no.: _____ Fax. no.: _____

Clinic 2 (if applicable)

Clinic name: _____

Address: _____

Contact person: _____

Tel. no.: _____ Fax. no.: _____