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Dear Doctor,

Arrival of the 2017/18 Winter Influenza Season in Hong Kong

I would like to update you on the latest seasonal influenza activities in Hong Kong and overseas countries. The latest surveillance data revealed that the local seasonal influenza activity has continued to increase in the past week and exceeded the baseline level, indicating that Hong Kong has entered the 2017/18 winter influenza season. We foresee that the influenza activity will continue to increase in the coming weeks and remain at an elevated level for some time.

Among the respiratory specimens received by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP), the percentage tested positive for influenza viruses rose from 9.32% in the week ending December 30 to over 15% in the following week. The circulating influenza viruses were predominantly influenza B, with low influenza A activity. Of note, the majority of the influenza B viruses belonged to the Yamagata lineage which is included in the quadrivalent seasonal influenza vaccine (SIV) for the 2017/18 Northern Hemisphere season but not in the trivalent SIV.

The CHP has collaborated with public hospitals under the Hospital Authority and private hospitals to monitor influenza-associated admissions to intensive care unit (ICU) and deaths among patients aged ≥ 18 years as routine surveillance throughout the year starting in 2018. As of yesterday (January 9), 24 cases (10 deaths) have been recorded.

Globally, the 2017/18 winter influenza season has already started in most areas in the temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere and the influenza activity continued to increase. Worldwide, influenza A(H3N2) and B viruses accounted for the majority of influenza detections. In North America, influenza activity continued to increase with the majority of influenza detections being influenza A(H3N2). In Europe, both influenza A and B viruses were co-circulating. In Mainland China, the overall influenza activity continued the increasing trend. The predominating virus was influenza B.



For the surveillance system for adult patients (aged ≥ 18 years) who required ICU admission or died AND had any positive laboratory result of influenza infection, private doctors are reminded to continue to report cases fulfilling the above criteria to the CHP through the infection control officer, infection control nurse or designated responsible officer in the respective private hospital. For patients admitted to public hospitals, the CHP has collaborated with the Hospital Authority (HA) to retrieve the data on ICU admissions and deaths with laboratory confirmation of influenza infection electronically. In addition, all doctors in both public and private sectors are reminded to continue to report any paediatric patients who fulfil the reporting criteria for severe paediatric influenza-associated complication/death to the CHP.

Please advise your patients who are aged six months or above especially the priority groups to receive the 2017/18 influenza vaccine as soon as possible for personal protection. Moreover, you may consider empirical treatment with neuraminidase inhibitor (e.g. oseltamivir) for your patients suspected to have influenza infection early based on clinical assessment, especially patients at higher risk of complications, such as young children, elders, people with chronic diseases, pregnant women, etc. Studies have shown that neuraminidase inhibitors can reduce severe outcomes of influenza. We would like to draw your attention to HA's internal clinical guideline on "Use of neuraminidase inhibitors in out-patient settings" (available from: <http://icidportal.ha.org.hk/sites/en/webpages/Seasonal%20Influenza%20Vaccination.aspx>).

The latest surveillance data on influenza are published in the "*Flu Express*", a weekly report available on the CHP website (http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/guideline1_year/29/134/441/304.html). Further information on influenza can be found from the following link: http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/14843.html. Please draw the attention of the healthcare professionals and supporting staff in your institution/ working with you to the above. May I take this opportunity to thank you for your continuous support in combating infectious diseases in Hong Kong.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. SK Chuang)

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