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Dear Doctor,

Arrival of the 2018/19 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 thresholds, indicating that Hong Kong has entered the 2018/19 winter influenza season. We anticipate that the influenza activity will continue to rise 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 has increased steadily since mid-November and rose to 14% last week. The circulating influenza viruses were predominantly influenza A(H1N1)pdm09. Of note, past epidemiological data showed that children and adults aged from 50 to 64 years were relatively more affected in seasons dominated by influenza A(H1).

The weekly number of institutional influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks reported to the CHP ranged from 8 to 17 in the past four weeks (December 2 to 29), affecting 341 persons. These outbreaks occurred in kindergartens/child care centres (30), primary schools (9), residential care homes for the elderly (6), residential care homes for the disabled (4), secondary schools (2), hospital (1) and special school (1).

Globally, influenza activities continued to increase in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere and influenza A(H1) accounted for the majority of influenza detections. The 2018/19 winter influenza season has already started in Japan, Korea, Canada and the United States. The seasonal influenza activity has also been increasing in the European Region including the United Kingdom. In Mainland China, most provinces have entered the influenza season and the influenza activity has continued to increase, with the predominant circulating virus being influenza A(H1). In Guangdong, influenza activity has also increased to a level above the baseline threshold since early December and the



predominating virus was also influenza A(H1).

Since 2018, the CHP has regularised the surveillance of influenza-associated admissions to intensive care unit (ICU) and deaths among patients aged ≥ 18 years as routine surveillance throughout the year. Private doctors are reminded to continue to report cases fulfilling the following criteria to the CHP through the infection control officer, infection control nurse or designated responsible officer of the respective private hospital: adult patients (aged ≥ 18 years) who (i) required ICU admission or died; AND (ii) had any positive laboratory result of influenza infection. For patients admitted to public hospitals, the CHP has collaborated with the Hospital Authority (HA) to retrieve the relevant data 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 2018/19 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/Home/File?path=/Use%20of%20neuraminidase%20inhibitors%20in%20out-patient%20settings.pdf>).

The latest surveillance data on influenza are published in the "*Flu Express*", a weekly report available on the CHP website (<https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/resources/29/304.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,



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