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Dear Doctor,

An outbreak of measles involving workers at the Hong Kong International Airport and crew members of an airline

We would like to draw your attention to an outbreak of measles infection affecting three workers at the Hong Kong International Airport and two crew members of an airline.

The first case involves a 22-year-old man with good past health, who developed fever on March 15 and rash on March 19. He reported to have received measles vaccination. The second case involves a 40-year-old man with good past health, who developed cough and fever on March 9 and rash on March 14. He has not received measles vaccination. The third case involves a 46-year-old woman with good past health, who developed fever on March 13 and rash on March 19. She has not received measles vaccination. All the three patients were admitted to public hospitals for treatment and are in a stable condition. All of them did not have known contact with any measles patient during the incubation period.

In addition, two crew members of a local airline company were also confirmed to have measles infection. The first case involves a 23-year-old man with good past health, who developed fever on March 1 and rash on March 4. He was in a stable condition and had already been discharged. He travelled to the Philippines and Japan during the period of communicability. The second case involves a 41-year-old man with good past health, who developed fever and rash on March 12. He did not report any direct contact with the above case. He travelled to a number of countries including Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines during the incubation and communicable periods. He was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and is in a stable condition. Both patients reported to have received measles vaccination and did not have contact with measles patients during the incubation period. The home contacts of the above five cases have remained asymptomatic so far and have been put under medical surveillance. The Centre for Health Protection's investigations are ongoing.



To prevent possible spread of infection, measles mop-up vaccination will be given to susceptible work contacts of the three patients. A vaccination station

will also be set up at the airport to provide measles vaccination to other non-immune people working there if necessary. A hotline (2125 1122) is set up for public enquiries.

In Hong Kong, there is upsurge in measles cases in 2019. As of March 23 11am, a total of 19 cases were reported to the CHP in 2019, as compared to nine, four and 15 cases in the whole year of 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively.

Globally, an increased number of measles cases were reported in many countries in 2018 and this surge continues through 2019. In the Philippines, a total of 18,407 measles cases were recorded in 2018, a nearly eight-fold increase as compared with 2,428 cases in 2017. This ongoing outbreak has further deteriorated in 2019 with 22,967 cases including 333 deaths recorded nationwide in 2019 (as of March 22). Japan has also experienced a marked upsurge of measles cases since January 2019. In the first 10 weeks of 2019 (as of March 13), 304 measles cases have been recorded as compared with 282, 189, 165 and 35 in the whole year of 2018, 2017, 2016 and 2015 respectively.

Moreover, measles remains as an endemic infection in some parts of Southeast Asia and Europe, with cases and outbreaks occurring from time to time. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), as of March 7, 2019, the 12-month measles incidence (number of cases per million population) reached 86.4, 81.0, 47.9 and 16.9 in Malaysia, Thailand, India and Indonesia respectively. In Europe, there were marked increases in measles cases in 2018 with 82,596 people in 47 of 53 countries contracted measles, including 72 deaths. The 12-month (February 2018 – January 2019) measles incidence rates were at very high levels in some countries including Greece (172.9), Slovakia (113.0), Romania (63.5), Italy (43.4) and France (41.8). These incidence rates were many times higher than that recorded in Hong Kong (2.0 cases per million population in 2018).

Hong Kong was certified by the WHO to have achieved the interruption of endemic measles virus transmission in September 2016. Nonetheless, Hong Kong, being an international city with high volume of trade and travel, is constantly facing the risk of importation of measles and the potential risk of further spread in the local community.

Vaccination is the best protection against measles and it is essential to maintain a high level of immunity in the local population to prevent the spread of measles in Hong Kong. The CHP advises all persons with incomplete vaccination, unknown vaccination history or unknown immunity against measles to consult their doctor for advice on measles vaccination. You and your clients may refer to the webpage (https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/learn_more_about_measles_vaccine_eng.pdf) for information on the history of measles vaccination provided by the Government for infants and children. People born and lived in Hong Kong before 1967 can be considered to have immunity from natural infection.

We would like to enlist your help to advise non-immune persons to receive Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine, in particular non-local born individuals (such as foreign workers, new immigrants, etc.) who might not have received any measles vaccination in their home country in the past. In general, people can be considered as non-immune to measles if they (i) do not have laboratory evidence of immunity; (ii) do not have laboratory confirmed measles infection in the past; and (iii) have not been vaccinated with two doses of measles-containing vaccine or have unknown vaccination status. All those who are unvaccinated or with unknown vaccination history should receive two doses of MMR vaccine, while those who had already received one dose of measles vaccination in the past should receive a further dose of MMR to complete the course.

Please advise pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy who are non-immune to measles as well as children aged under one year who are not due for the first dose of MMR vaccine not to travel to places with outbreaks of measles. Contacts of measles patients and travellers returning from places with high incidence or outbreak of measles should seek medical advice immediately if they develop symptoms of measles (e.g. fever and rash), and avoid contact with non-immune persons, especially pregnant women and infants. People suspected to have been exposed to measles infection are advised to report their symptoms and travel history in advance to their healthcare workers. Please implement appropriate infection control measures at your healthcare facilities to prevent any potential spread from suspected measles cases.

In addition, measles is a statutory notifiable disease in Hong Kong. Suspected or confirmed measles cases should be notified to the Central Notification Office of the CHP via fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or CENO On-line (https://cdis.chp.gov.hk/CDIS_CENO_ONLINE/ceno.html).

Please draw the attention of the healthcare professionals and supporting staff in your institution/ working with you to the above. Thank you for your unfailing support in prevention and control of communicable diseases.

Yours faithfully,



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