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Dear Doctor,

Latest Situation of COVID-19 in Korea and Revised Reporting Criteria for Suspected Cases of COVID-19

We would like to update you on the on-going COVID-19 outbreaks occurring in Korea (also referred as “South Korea”), and the revised reporting criteria of “Severe Respiratory Disease associated with a Novel Infectious Agent”.

According to information from the health authority of Korea, there was a huge increase in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past few days, which was related to on-going large outbreaks in several of its counties / provinces. As at 4pm on 24 February, there are 833 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Korea including 7 deaths. The first case of COVID-19 in Korea was reported on 20 January 2020. From 20 January to 18 February, only 31 cases were reported. However, since 19 February, there have been sharp increases in the daily number of confirmed cases (51, 74, 48, 352 and 207 cases per day during 19 February – 23 February). Among the 763 cases (as of 9am on 24 February), the majority of the cases occurred in Daegu City (442, 57.9%), Gyeongbuk Province (186, 24.3%), Gyeonggi (35, 4.6%), Seoul (30, 3.9%) and Gyeongnam (20, 2.6%) and Busan (17, 1.3%). The remaining 33 cases occurred in other places in Korea including Incheon, Gwangju, Daejeon, Ulsan, Sejong, Gangwon, Chungbuk, Chungnam, Jeonbuk, Jeonnam and Jeju. Of note, in Daegu and Gyeongbuk, 456 cases were associated with Shincheonji Church of Jesus while 113 were associated with Cheongdo-gun Daenam Hospital.

Other than Korea, community transmission was also occurring in some overseas countries such as Italy and Japan. In Japan, a total of 144 cases were confirmed, with 12 to 31 cases reported daily in the past three days. Cases were mainly distributed in Tokyo, Hokkaido and Wakayama, with the rest scattered in about 15 other regions. In Italy, the number of cases had elevated sharply since 21 Feb. At least 132 cases were detected with outbreaks occurring in Lombardy (88 cases) and Veneto (24 cases). Information on the number of cases reported in various countries/areas is available on the designated website for COVID-19:



https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/statistics_of_the_cases_novel_coronavirus_infection_en.pdf.

The Government has issued a Red Outbound Travel Alert (OTA) on Korea as there may be great potential and risk of exposure through travel given the significant flow of people between Korea and Hong Kong. In response to the latest situation and risk assessment of the situation of COVID-19 in Korea, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health will revise the reporting criteria of “Severe Respiratory Disease associated with a Novel Infectious Agent” as follows:

- Presented with fever **OR** acute respiratory illness **OR** pneumonia; **AND**
- Either one of the following conditions within 14 days **BEFORE ONSET OF SYMPTOM**:
 1. With travel history to Mainland China or Korea; **OR**
 2. Had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

The revised reporting criteria is also available on website of the Central Notification Office (“CENO On-line”) (https://cdis.chp.gov.hk/CDIS_CENO_ONLINE/ceno.html). Please report cases fulfilling the reporting criteria to the Central Notification Office (CENO) of CHP via fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or CENO On-line. Private doctors are reminded to call the Medical Control Officer (MCO) of DH at Pager: 7116 3300 call 9179 immediately when reporting any case. The CHP will make arrangement to transfer the patient to a public hospital by ambulance for isolation, testing and treatment.

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 disease in Hong Kong.

Yours faithfully,



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