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Dear Doctor,

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

We would like to update you on the latest overseas situation of COVID-19, and the revised reporting criteria for suspected cases of COVID-19.

The situation of COVID-19 has been evolving rapidly. Active community transmissions are occurring in Korea, Italy (Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia Romagna regions) and Iran in the past week. The Italian Ministry of Health recently reported a drastic and multifold increase in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19. As at 6pm on 27 February, there were 650 COVID-19 cases (including 17 deaths) in Italy. The first two cases were reported on 30 January 2020. From 30 January to 22 February, only 17 cases were reported. However, since 23 February, there have been sharp increases in the daily number of confirmed cases (115, 97, 93, 78 and 250 cases per day during 23 – 27 February). The majority of the cases occurred in the regions of Lombardia (403, 62%), Veneto (111, 17%) and Emilia Romagna (97, 14.9%), while the remaining 39 cases were scattered in 10 other regions in Italy. There was no active community transmission in other parts of Italy according to information up to 27 February. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the current event indicates that local transmission may have resulted in several clusters for which an epidemiological link to areas where ongoing transmission is presumed.

In Korea, a total of 2022 cases have been reported including 13 deaths. Since 22 February, there has been a huge increase in the daily number of cases reported (130 - 427 cases per day during 22 – 27 February). Majority of the cases occurred in Daegu city (1314, 76%) and Gyeongbuk (394, 19%). The remaining cases were scattered in 15 other regions. Among the 2022 cases, 840 cases (41.5%) were associated with Shincheonji Church of Jesus in Daeju and 117 cases (5.8%) were associated with Cheongdo-gun Daennam Hospital in Gyeongbuk.



Other than Italy (Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia Romagna regions) and Korea, there was also a marked increase in the number of reported cases in Iran. A total of

245 confirmed cases (including 26 deaths) have been reported, with 25, 18, 34, 44 and 106 cases reported per day during 23 – 27 February. The case fatality rate was 10.6%, which was much higher than that reported by any other countries.

In view of the latest situation of COVID-19 in overseas countries, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has further revised 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 **a place with active community transmission of COVID-19; OR**
 2. Had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

*(*Except fever due to a known etiology not related to respiratory infections)*

The list of places with active community transmission is available from the following webpage of CHP: https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/statistics_of_the_cases_novel_coronavirus_infection_en.pdf. The list will be updated from time to time. **Currently, areas with active community transmission include Mainland China, Korea, Iran, and three regions of Italy (Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia Romagna).** 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 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,



(Dr. SK Chuang)

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