

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (74) in DH CDB/9/12/5 Pt.1

24 September 2021

Dear Doctor,

Latest situation of upper respiratory tract infection outbreaks and appeal to collect specimens for upper respiratory tract infection

We write to update you on the latest situation of upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) outbreaks in Hong Kong, and to solicit your support to offer COVID-19 testing for all patients with acute respiratory symptoms in order to identify infected persons in the community as early as possible amid the COVID-19 epidemic.

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) has received increased reports on institutional URTI. A total of 101 URTI outbreaks affecting 611 persons were reported in recent two weeks (from 10 to 23 September). Among them, most of the outbreaks had occurred in kindergartens/ child care centres and affected children.

As symptoms of URTI could also be a clinical manifestation of COVID-19, it could be difficult to differentiate them clinically. ***We strongly urge doctors to remain vigilant and to arrange testing for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens for patients presenting with any acute symptoms, irrespective of their travel history and clinical severity.*** Testing of respiratory pathogens at an earlier stage is crucial to facilitate early case detection and treatment, and hence reduce community spread. This is particularly important for cases occurring in schools and other institutional settings, where infectious diseases might spread more easily.

For prudence's sake, the schools with ILI or URTI outbreaks will be covered in the compulsory testing notice (CTN) to exclude the possibility of COVID-19 infection. The whole school of kindergartens/child care centres and the affected forms of primary and secondary schools are required to suspend teaching activities for cleaning for 5 days. All students and staff affected by class suspension are required to receive COVID-19 testing under



CTN and must be tested negative before they are allowed to go back to the school after school resumption. Starting from 8 September 2021, persons subject to compulsory testing in relation to an URTI or ILI outbreak in a school must attend to any of the mobile specimen collection stations, community testing centres or recognised local medical testing institutions to undergo professional swab sampling in fulfilling the requirements for compulsory testing. Young children aged below three years may continue to undergo the test through stool specimen collected using bottles provided by the CHP

(<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202109/07/P2021090700940.htm>).

Besides receiving seasonal influenza vaccination as early as possible for personal protection, you may advise your patients on the following measures to prevent upper respiratory tract infection:

- Surgical mask can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;
- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching one's eyes, mouth and nose;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated; when hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub as an effective alternative;
- Cover the nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly into a lidded rubbish bin, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

Thank you again for your unfailing support and concerted efforts in the prevention and control of communicable diseases.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark red ink, appearing to read 'SK Chuang', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

(Dr. SK CHUANG)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health