Series Communicable Diseases

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Management

Causative agent

*Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)* is the disease caused by a new coronavirus called *SARS-CoV-2*.

Clinical features

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, dry cough and fatigue. Other symptoms include loss of taste or smell, nasal congestion, conjunctivitis, sore throat, headache, muscle or joint pain, skin rash, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, chills or dizziness. Some people may only have very mild or non-specific symptoms, while some may develop severe symptoms like shortness of breath, chest pain or confusion. Complications may include respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), sepsis and septic shock, thrombocytopenia, and/or multi-organ failure including injury of the heart, liver or kidneys. There are reports that children and adolescents with COVID-19 may develop a rare but serious condition known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), leading to multiorgan failure and shock. People of older age and those having underlying medical problems (e.g. hypertension, heart and lung problems, diabetes, obesity or cancer) are at higher risk of developing serious illness. According to the information from the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 10-20% of people may continue to experience short and/or long-term effects of COVID-19, including fatigue, respiratory failure and shock.

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Prevention

COVID-19 vaccination

- COVID-19 vaccines are effective to protect people against COVID-19 disease, in particular severe illness and death.
- Vaccination is one of the tools in the overall public health response to COVID-19. The combination of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) with vaccination will allow for maximum protection against the virus.
- With COVID-19 vaccines deployed, there is a need to continue NPIs, including social distancing, good hand hygiene and wearing a mask in public, to reduce the risk of virus transmission. NPIs should continue to be followed by vaccinated individuals, as well as those who have not yet been vaccinated.
- For details on COVID-19 vaccination, please refer to thematic website for COVID-19 Vaccination Programme: www.covidvaccine.gov.hk

Health advice

Members of the public are urged to go out less and reduce social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings, and maintain appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible. To maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of spread of the disease in the community.

- Well-fitted 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 well-fitted surgical mask;
- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear the mask properly, including hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose before washing hands;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching one’s mouth, nose or eyes; before eating; after using the toilet; after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs; or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. When the hands are cleaned, do not touch the water tap directly again (for example, using a paper towel to wrap the faucet before turn it off). If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80% alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- 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 good indoor ventilation;
- Home should be cleaned thoroughly at least once per week with 1 in 99 diluted household bleach (mixing 10ml of bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite with 990ml of water), leave for 15 - 30 minutes and then rinse with water. For metallic surface, disinfect with 70% alcohol;
- If places are contaminated by respiratory secretions, vomitus or excreta, use strong absorbent disposable towels to clean up the visible matter. Then disinfect the surface and the neighbouring area with appropriate disinfectant. For non-metallic surface, disinfect with 1 in 49 diluted household bleach (mixture of 10ml of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite solution with 490ml of water), leave for 15 - 30 minutes, and then rinse with water. For metallic surface, disinfect with 70% alcohol;

NPIs should continue to be followed by vaccinated individuals, as well as those who have not yet been vaccinated.

- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-traps) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Build up good body resistance and maintain healthy lifestyle. This can be achieved through balanced diet, regular exercise and adequate rest and sleep;
- Do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption. Remark: Face mask is not recommended for children under the age of 2 years without supervision.

For the latest travel advice, please visit the thematic website (https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html).