

CHP investigates case of Shiga toxin-producing E. coli infection

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (July 3) investigating a case of Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC) infection, and hence reminded the public to maintain good personal, food and environmental hygiene against intestinal infections.

The case involves a 1-year-old boy with good past health, who has presented with fever and diarrhoea since June 15. He was admitted to a private hospital on June 17 and was discharged the next day. The patient has been in a stable condition all along.

His stool specimen grew STEC upon laboratory testing.

Initial enquiries of the CHP revealed that the patient had no travel history during the incubation period. Investigations are ongoing.

"Escherichia coli (E. coli) is a bacterium that is commonly found in the gut of humans and warm-blooded animals. Most strains of E. coli are harmless. Some strains, however, such as STEC, can produce powerful toxins and cause severe food-borne disease. The most recognised serogroup of STEC is E. coli O157:H7," a spokesman for the CHP explained.

Preventive measures for STEC infection are similar to those recommended for other food-borne diseases. The public are advised to observe good personal and food hygiene:

- Adopt the Five Keys to Food Safety in handling food, i.e. Choose (choose safe raw materials), Clean (keep hands and utensils clean), Separate (separate raw and cooked food), Cook (cook thoroughly) and Safe Temperature (keep food at a safe temperature) to prevent food-borne diseases;
- Wash hands properly with liquid soap and water before handling food, after handling raw meat or poultry and before eating, and after going to the toilet or changing diapers;
- Cook food and boil water thoroughly before consumption. When cooking or reheating, the core temperature of the food should reach at least 75 degrees Celsius;
- Avoid consumption of unpasteurised milk or undercooked food; and
- Consult your doctor immediately if you have symptoms of STEC infection, particularly bloody diarrhoea.

The public may visit the CHP's [STEC page](#) for more information.

Illegal worker jailed

A Vietnamese illegal worker holding a recognisance form was jailed by Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday (July 2).

During operation "Twilight" conducted on June 29, Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided a refuse collection room of a residential building in Sheung Wan. A female Vietnamese illegal worker, aged 35, was arrested while working as a garbage worker. Upon identity checking, she produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits her from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that she was a non-refoulement claimant. An employer suspected of employing the illegal worker was also arrested and investigation is ongoing.

The illegal worker was charged at Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday with taking employment after landing in Hong Kong unlawfully and remaining in Hong Kong without the authority of the Director of Immigration or while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force. She pleaded guilty to the charge and was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment. Meanwhile, she was also charged with one count of using a false instrument and was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment. All sentences are to run concurrently, making a total of 15 months' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases. Under the prevailing laws, it is an offence to make, possess or use false instruments. Upon conviction, offenders are liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening on vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers who are arrested during any operation, with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

Update on latest MERS situation in Saudi Arabia

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (July 3) closely monitoring nine additional cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by Saudi Arabia from April 1 to May 31. The CHP again urged the public to pay special attention to safety during travel, taking due consideration of the health risks in the places they visit.

According to the WHO, the nine additional cases involve eight male patients and one female patient aged 31 to 96, with seven of them having underlying illnesses. Among them, one had exposure to camels and consumed camel milk, one was a healthcare worker, five had contact with previously confirmed patients and five have passed away.

According to the latest information, 2 562 cases have been reported to the WHO (with 881 deaths), including 2 343 in 10 Middle East countries comprising 2 163 in Saudi Arabia, 91 in the United Arab Emirates, 28 in Jordan, 24 in Oman, 23 in Qatar, six in Iran, four in Kuwait, two in Lebanon, and one each in Yemen and Bahrain.

"We will maintain close communication with the WHO and relevant health authorities," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"As countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time, travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had a history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients," the spokesman said.

"Scientific evidence shows that camels are reservoirs for MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through nasal and eye discharge and faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus may also be found in the raw organs and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best protection is to practise good hygiene and avoid direct contact with all of these," the spokesman added.

From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involve patients with a history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV.

Travellers to affected areas should maintain vigilance, adopt appropriate health precautions and take heed of personal, food and environmental hygiene. The public may visit the MERS page of the [CHP](#) and its [Travel Health Service](#) to learn more about MERS statistics in [affected areas](#). The public should also refer to the CHP's [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#) and the WHO's [latest news](#) for more information and health advice. Tour leaders and tour guides operating overseas tours are advised to refer to the CHP's [health advice on MERS](#).

Red tide sighted

A red tide has been sighted over the past week, an inter-departmental red tide working group reported today (July 3).

The red tide was spotted by staff of the Marine Department on June 28 in the southern waters including the Tathong Channel, the East Lamma Channel, the West Lamma Channel and Victoria Harbour. The red tide still persists. No associated death of fish has been reported.

A spokesman for the working group said, "The red tide was formed by *Pseudo-nitzschia pungens*, *Chaetoceros pseudocurvisetus* and *Guinardia delicatula*, which are commonly found in Hong Kong waters and non-toxic."

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) urged mariculturists at the Ma Wan, Cheung Sha Wan, Lo Tik Wan, Sok Kwu Wan, Po Toi O, Tung Lung Chau and Po Toi fish culture zones to monitor the situation closely and increase aeration where necessary.

Red tide is a natural phenomenon. The AFCD's proactive phytoplankton monitoring programme will continue to monitor red tide occurrences to minimise the impact on the mariculture industry and the public.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Friday, July 3, 2020 is 107.7 (same as yesterday's index).