

CHP investigates case of severe paediatric influenza A infection

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 30) investigating a case of severe paediatric influenza A infection and reminded the community to heighten vigilance against influenza.

The case involves a 18-month-old baby boy with good past health, who has presented with fever, cough, runny nose and vomiting since December 28. He was taken to the Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital for medical advice on December 29 and was admitted for treatment. He was transferred to the paediatric intensive care unit at Queen Mary Hospital on the next day for further management.

His respiratory specimen tested positive for influenza A virus upon laboratory testing. The clinical diagnosis was influenza A infection complicated with encephalopathy. He is now in critical condition.

Initial enquiries revealed that the patient had received a seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) for this season and had no travel history during the incubation period. His home contacts have remained asymptomatic so far.

The CHP's investigations are ongoing.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "The latest surveillance data showed that the overall local seasonal influenza activity has been increasing gradually in the past two weeks, and the winter influenza season might arrive soon. Members of the public aged six months or above who have not yet received influenza vaccination, particularly children, the elderly and those with underlying illnesses, are advised to receive an SIV as early as possible to better protect themselves in the coming winter influenza season against influenza A and B infections. It takes about two weeks for antibodies to develop in the body after vaccination."

The 2019/20 seasonal influenza vaccination programmes, including the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme and the Government Vaccination Programme, have been launched. As well, the SIV school outreach has been regularised to allow all primary schools to join, and has been extended to kindergartens, child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres as a pilot.

"Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. Given that influenza vaccines are safe and effective, all persons aged six months or above, except those with known contraindications, are recommended to receive an SIV for personal protection. Vaccinations among family members is key to protecting their personal and family health," the spokesman said.

The public should maintain good personal and environmental hygiene for protection against influenza and other respiratory illnesses:

- Receive an SIV for personal protection;
- 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;
- Wash or clean hands frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, or after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs;
- Cover the nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin;
- Put on a surgical mask when respiratory symptoms develop;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places; high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks when staying in such places; and
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

The public may visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and weekly [Flu Express](#) for more information.