

CHP investigates outbreak of measles infection

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (March 22) investigating an outbreak of measles infection affecting workers at the Hong Kong International Airport and hence reminded the public again that vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles.

As at 7pm today, three cases were identified. The first case involves a 22-year-old man with good past health, who developed fever on March 15 and rash on March 19. He attended a private clinic on March 17 and 19. He sought medical advice at Yan Chai Hospital on March 20 and was admitted for treatment. His nasopharyngeal aspirate (NPA) tested positive for measles virus upon laboratory testing. He is in a stable condition. The patient reported to have received measles vaccination.

The second case involves a 40-year-old man with good past health, who developed cough and fever on March 9 and rash on March 14. He consulted a private doctor on March 14. He attended Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) on March 16 and was admitted for treatment. His NPA tested positive for measles virus upon laboratory testing. He is in a stable condition. The patient has not received measles vaccination.

The third case involves a 46-year-old woman with good past health, who developed fever on March 13 and rash on March 19. She attended a private clinic on March 15. She sought medical advice at PMH on March 17 and was admitted for treatment. Her blood specimen tested positive for measles virus upon laboratory testing. She is in a stable condition. The patient has not received measles vaccination.

According to the patients, all of them did not have contact with measles patients during the incubation period. They had no travel history during the incubation period or the communicable period. Their home contacts have remained asymptomatic so far and have been put under medical surveillance.

The public places the three patients visited during the communicable period are listed in the appendix.

"Upon notification of the cases, officers of the CHP have initiated epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing immediately to identify other possible patients as soon as possible," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"A health talk was conducted at the airport tonight to deliver measles-related health advice to people working there. To prevent possible spread of infection, measles mop-up vaccination has been given tonight to close work contacts of the three patients," the spokesman added.

Starting tomorrow (March 23), a vaccination station will be set up at

the airport to provide measles vaccination to other non-immune people working there if necessary. A hotline (2125 1122) will be set up for public enquiries and will operate from 9am to 5.45pm daily from tomorrow.

The spokesman said, "Those who might have had contact with the patients during the period of communicability are urged to observe if they have developed measles-related symptoms, and to seek medical treatment immediately if such symptoms appear. They should also report their symptoms and prior travel history to the healthcare workers so that appropriate infection control measures can be implemented at the healthcare facilities to prevent any potential spread."

The spokesman explained that measles is a highly infectious disease caused by the measles virus. It can be transmitted by airborne droplets spread or direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected persons, and, less commonly, by articles soiled with nose and throat secretions. A patient can pass the disease to other persons from four days before to four days after the appearance of skin rash.

The spokesman reminded the public that the incubation period of measles ranges from seven days to up to 21 days. Contacts who are not immune to measles may develop relevant symptoms, such as fever, skin rash, cough, runny nose and red eyes, in the incubation period. They should observe if they develop such symptoms in the period. If symptoms arise, they should wear surgical masks, stop going to work or school and avoid going to crowded places. They should also avoid contact with non-immune persons, especially persons with weakened immunity, pregnant women and children aged below 1.

In Hong Kong, children are given the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine at 1 year old, followed by a second dose at Primary One under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme. The coverage of MMR vaccination in Hong Kong is over 95 per cent at Primary One.

"Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles. Members of the public who are planning to travel to places with high incidence or outbreaks of measles should review their vaccination history and past medical history, especially people born outside Hong Kong who might not have received measles vaccination during childhood. The history of measles vaccination in Hong Kong is available in the CHP's measles thematic page. Those who have not received two doses of measles-containing vaccines, with unknown vaccination history or with unknown immunity against measles are urged to consult their doctor for advice on vaccination at least two weeks before departure," the spokesman said.

Besides being vaccinated against measles, members of the public should take the following measures to prevent infection:

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly;
- Wash hands when they are dirtied by respiratory secretions, such as after sneezing;

- Cover the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and mouth discharge properly;
- Clean used toys and furniture properly; and
- Persons with measles should be kept out of school till four days from the appearance of rash to prevent spread of the infection to non-immune persons in school.

For more information on measles, the public may call the 24-hour health education hotline 2833 0111 or visit the CHP's measles thematic page. For outbreak news of measles outside Hong Kong or the latest travel health advice, please visit the website of DH's Travel Health Service.