

CHP participates in WHO's IHR Exercise Crystal to enhance communications on and preparedness for infectious diseases (with photo)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health, together with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, today (December 3) participated in the annual International Health Regulations (IHR) Exercise Crystal organised by the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO) to enhance communications on and preparedness for the emergence of infectious diseases.

Exercise Crystal is a functional exercise held annually by the WPRO to test, among others, communication of IHR focal points in terms of public health event reporting, verification, notification, information sharing and risk assessment. The CHP, as an IHR focal point, has been participating in IHR Exercise Crystal for years.

The simulated scenario of the exercise this year involved a new virus having been detected with pandemic potential against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing around the world. Today's exercise consisted of two parts. The first part was a table-top exercise during which a number of detailed communications were sent from the WHO providing information on the evolving scenario and triggering tasks for completion by the participants. During the table-top exercise, the CHP personnel and representatives from the AFCD and the CFS discussed and co-ordinated the communicable disease response measures required in the simulated scenario of detection of a new virus with implications for Hong Kong.

The second part was a debriefing held by WPRO immediately after the table-top exercise. At the debriefing, representatives from Hong Kong shared their experiences and observations with the WPRO and other participating countries and regions virtually through video conferencing.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "The exercise provided a valuable opportunity to test the preparedness of relevant parties in the local setting to respond effectively to a novel infectious disease. It also enhanced the effectiveness of the response plans for communicable disease and identified room for improvement, enhancing vigilance to better prepare ourselves for a public health emergency.

"Towards this end, we will consolidate the experience gained from this exercise, strengthen our current capacities and map out targeted and refined strategies in the future," the spokesman added.

