

# CHP reminds outbound travellers to take precautionary measures against measles infection

In view of the recent increase in measles cases in some overseas countries, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (February 27) reminded the public to ensure that they have completed two doses of measles vaccination before travelling abroad to reduce the risk of infection.

The CHP is concerned about the recent measles outbreaks in Texas of the United States (US). At least 124 cases of measles have been reported since the end of January this year, mostly in people who had not received measles vaccination or whose vaccination history was unknown. Over 80 per cent of the cases involved children under 18 years old, including one fatal case in a school-aged child who had not been vaccinated against measles. The CHP has taken the initiative to contact the US health authorities to learn more about the situation.

Apart from the US, measles outbreaks have occurred in neighboring countries, including Vietnam and the Philippines, due to suboptimal overall measles vaccination coverage.

The Controller of the CHP, Dr Edwin Tsui, stressed that vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles.

"The measles situation outside Hong Kong reflects the importance of vaccination in preventing measles. Under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme, the overall immunisation coverage in Hong Kong has been maintained at a very high level through the immunisation services provided by the DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres and the School Immunisation Teams. As evidenced by the findings on vaccination coverage of primary school students and the territory-wide immunisation surveys conducted regularly by the DH, the two-dose measles vaccination coverage has remained consistently high, well above 95 per cent, and the local seroprevalence rates of measles virus antibodies reflect that most of the people in Hong Kong are immune to measles. On the whole, the risk of a large-scale outbreak in Hong Kong is low. Also, no measles cases have been reported so far this year."

"However, as a city with a high volume of international travel, Hong Kong still faces the potential risk of importation of measles virus and its further spread in the local community. Hence, a small number of people who have not completed measles vaccination (such as non-local born people including new immigrants, foreign domestic helpers, overseas employees and people coming to Hong Kong for further studies) are still at risk of being infected and spreading measles to other people who do not have immunity against measles, such as children under one year old who have not yet received the first dose of measles vaccine," he said.

Dr Tsui added that people born before 1967 could be considered to have acquired immunity to measles through natural infection, as measles was endemic in many parts of the world and in Hong Kong at that time. He urged people born in or after 1967 who have not yet completed the two doses of measles vaccination or whose measles vaccination history is unknown, to consult their family doctors as soon as possible to complete the vaccination and ensure adequate protection against measles. For those who plan to travel to measles-endemic areas, they should check their vaccination records and medical history as early as possible. If they have not been diagnosed with measles through laboratory tests and have never received two doses of measles vaccine or are not sure if they have received measles vaccine, they should consult a doctor at least two weeks prior to their trip for vaccination.

"The incubation period of measles (i.e. the time from infection to onset of illness) is seven to 21 days. Symptoms include fever, skin rash, cough, runny nose and red eyes. When such symptoms appear, people should wear surgical masks, stay home from work or school, avoid crowded places and contact with unvaccinated people, especially those with weak immune system, pregnant women and children under one year old. Those who suspected they are infected should consult their doctors as soon as possible and inform healthcare workers of their history of exposure to measles," he said.

For more information on measles, members of the public may visit the CHP's thematic [webpage](#). For those who are planning to travel, they may also refer to the DH's [Travel Health Service's webpage](#) for information on measles outbreaks in places outside Hong Kong.