

# CHP reminds public to take precautions against measles during travel

In view of the recent increase in measles cases in many overseas countries, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (March 14) reminded the public to ensure that they have completed two doses of measles vaccination before travelling abroad to reduce the risk of infection.

According to the latest information released by the World Health Organization, over 127 000 measles cases (including at least 38 deaths) were reported in Europe and Central Asia last year, double the number of cases reported for 2023 and the highest number since 1997. Children under 5 accounted for more than 40 per cent of the cases, as childhood measles vaccination coverage remained suboptimal in some countries. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control also reported that the majority of paediatric cases have never been vaccinated against measles. In the ongoing measles outbreaks in North America, the United States and Canada have each recorded more than 200 cases so far this year, with cases mainly affecting children who were unvaccinated or had unknown vaccination status. In neighboring areas, measles outbreaks continued to occur from time to time in the past year in Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Hong Kong has recorded [one imported measles case](#) so far this year. The patient travelled to Vietnam during the incubation period. No other cases were identified.

The Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the DH, Dr Edwin Tsui, reiterated that vaccination is the most safe and effective preventive measure against measles. Healthy people in general can enjoy long-term, even lifelong protection after receiving measles vaccination as recommended. Two doses of measles-containing vaccine can confer protection of up to 97 per cent.

"The measles situation outside Hong Kong reflects the risk of outbreak due to inadequate vaccination coverage. 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. However, as a city with a high volume of international travel, Hong Kong still faces the potential risk of measles importation. Locally, a

small number of people who have not completed a 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 1 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 the 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 systems, pregnant women and children under 1 year old. Those who suspect they are infected should consult their doctors as soon as possible and inform healthcare workers of their history of exposure to measles.

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.