

CHP updates antimicrobial guidelines and urges doctors to prescribe antimicrobials appropriately

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (June 19) launched a new edition of antimicrobial guidelines entitled the Interhospital Multi-disciplinary Programme on Antimicrobial ChemoTherapy (IMPACT) Guidelines. These guidelines serve as a reference for doctors when prescribing antimicrobial drugs for inpatients, aiming to prevent overuse which may aggravate antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

"In view of the evolving AMR situations, the CHP in collaboration with experts updated IMPACT based on local AMR data and the latest international and local literature for reference of doctors so that antimicrobials can be prescribed in a more accurate manner. The CHP organised a forum today to introduce the major updates of the guidelines, including the empirical therapy of common infections, antimicrobials for known pathogens and recommendations for surgical antimicrobial prophylaxis to over 150 participating healthcare professionals from the public and private sectors. Recommended dosing and adverse reactions for certain antimicrobials are also set out in the updated guidelines," said the Consultant (Antimicrobial Resistance) of the Infection Control Branch of the CHP, Dr Edmond Ma.

In addition to the forum for the medical field, the CHP also issued a Letter to Doctors today, urging them to refer to the new guidelines and prescribe the appropriate antimicrobials to patients in need. This will help curb the spread of drug resistance and safeguard the effectiveness of existing treatments.

Dr Ma added, "AMR occurs when microorganisms (such as bacteria and viruses) evolve and become resistant to previously effective medications. When patients are infected with drug-resistant bacteria, their illness may be prolonged, and their risk of death may even increase. The misuse and overuse of antibiotics are the major drivers of drug-resistant bacteria. Since the first edition of the IMPACT Guidelines was launched in 1999, it has become an important reference for healthcare professionals, helping to minimise unnecessary or inappropriate prescribing of antimicrobials. At the same time, it has become a key foundation for launching the Antimicrobial Stewardship Programme in public hospitals and will facilitate the enhancement of relevant measures in private hospitals in the future. According to the latest surveillance data, the proportion of antimicrobials in the Watch category (i.e. antimicrobials considered by the World Health Organization to be at a higher risk of developing drug resistance) in the total supply of antimicrobials in Hong Kong decreased from 40.3 per cent in 2016 to 34.6 per cent in 2024, indicating that doctors are prescribing relatively fewer broad spectrum antibiotics to help combat AMR."

The Government has been placing great importance on addressing the necessity of combating AMR. In 2022, the Government published the second Hong Kong Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (Action Plan), outlining strategies to tackle the threat of AMR from 2023 to 2027. The measures include reviewing and updating IMPACT, and reminding doctors to prescribe antimicrobials to patients in accordance with guidelines and scientific evidence.

The IMPACT set of guidelines, now in its 6th edition, are a collaborative effort among the CHP, the Hospital Authority, the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong, the Faculty of Medicine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Medical Association and the Hong Kong Private Hospitals Association. The CHP would like to express its sincere gratitude to the Editors, Dr Ho Pak-leung, Dr Wu Tak-chiu, and the other members of the Editorial Board.

The CHP also urged members of the public to work with healthcare professionals to eliminate AMR by observing the following:

- Consult a doctor when having a cold, flu or COVID-19. Do not buy antibiotics without a prescription at community pharmacies;
- Do not demand antibiotics from doctors. Only take antibiotics when advised by doctors and complete the whole course of treatment even if symptoms have improved;
- Follow health advice stated on the prescription bag and adopt appropriate infection control measures such as maintaining hand hygiene, wearing a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, and disinfecting and covering all wounds properly to prevent person-to-person spread of resistant bacteria when taking antibiotics;
- Receive seasonal influenza and COVID-19 vaccines as effective means to prevent secondary bacterial infection, hence reducing the use of antibiotics and occurrence of AMR;
- Be aware of the risk of acquiring resistant bacteria from ready-to-eat (RTE) food. People taking antibiotics or antacids, and high-risk populations (such as pregnant women, infants and young children, the elderly and people with weakened immunity) are of higher risk and should avoid eating raw or undercooked RTE foods; and
- Observe good hygienic practices in the kitchen when handling food to minimise the risk of cross-contamination by resistant bacteria.

For details of the IMPACT Guidelines, please visit the IMPACT webpage (impact.chp.gov.hk/). For more information about AMR, please visit the CHP [website](#).