

CHP updates on clusters of students participating in exchange tour who developed gastroenteritis symptoms

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (March 11) continued its investigations into the cluster of gastroenteritis symptoms among students who participated in an exchange tour to Shaoguan in Guangdong Province, and found that teachers and students from two other schools who participated in exchange tours to the same locations in Shaoguan in early March also developed gastroenteritis symptoms. The CHP has provided health advice to the affected schools on the transmission, prevention and infection control measures related to acute gastroenteritis (AGE).

During the investigation into the cluster [announced yesterday](#), the CHP found that teachers and students who participated in two other exchange tours to the same locations in Shaoguan on March 3 to 4 and March 6 to 7 also developed gastroenteritis symptoms. Including the cluster announced yesterday, a total of 52 teachers and students developed AGE symptoms from March 3 to 10. Sixteen of them sought medical attention and none required hospitalisation.

The CHP is investigating the source of this AGE outbreak from different perspectives. The CHP's epidemiological investigations revealed that the teachers and students of the three exchange tours had dined in the same restaurants. The CHP could not rule out the possibility that some of the cases were infected by consuming contaminated food and has notified the Guangdong authority of the relevant restaurants. Separately, a case vomited during the visit and more teachers and students subsequently fell ill after returning to Hong Kong. In this context, some of the cases may have been infected through person-to-person transmission or a contaminated environment.

The CHP will continue to follow up on the incidents and conduct epidemiological investigations, including collecting stool specimens from the cases for laboratory testing and advising the schools concerned on infection control measures. The CHP has also alerted the Education Bureau to the situation.

Viral gastroenteritis is more commonly seen in cooler months and can be caused by a variety of viruses, most commonly norovirus and rotavirus. The main symptoms of viral gastroenteritis are diarrhoea and vomiting. Other symptoms include headache, fever, and abdominal cramps. In general, the symptoms begin one to two days following infection with a virus that causes gastroenteritis. Depending on the type of viruses causing the illness, however, the symptoms may last for one to 10 days.

Alcohol-based handrub should not substitute hand hygiene with liquid soap and water, as alcohol does not effectively kill some viruses frequently causing AGE, for example, norovirus. To prevent foodborne diseases, members

of the public are advised to observe good personal, food and environmental hygiene. When eating out, the following points should be observed:

- Ensure proper personal hygiene;
- Wash hands thoroughly before handling food and eating, after using the toilet or after changing diapers;
- Wear gloves when disposing of vomitus or faecal matter, and wash hands afterwards;
- Clean and disinfect contaminated areas or items promptly and thoroughly with diluted household bleach (by adding one part of bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water). Wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Pay attention to food hygiene;
- Use separate utensils to handle raw and cooked food;
- Avoid food that is not thoroughly cooked;
- Drink boiled water; and
- Do not patronise unlicensed food premises or food stalls.

The public may visit the CHP's website for more information and preventive advice on [viral gastroenteritis](#).