

## DH appeals to high-risk individuals to remain vigilant despite COVID-19 activity slowdown in Hong Kong

â€‹The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 23) said that there are early signs that the rate of increase in the COVID-19 activity level in Hong Kong has begun to slow down. However, it is expected to remain at a relatively high level in the near future. High-risk individuals, especially the elderly and those with underlying illnesses, should continue to stay vigilant and receive a free booster dose in a timely manner to minimise the risk of serious complications or death after infection.

"The CHP believes that COVID-19 has become an endemic disease with cyclical patterns. Epidemiological data from local and other regions around the world show that there are generally periodic upsurges in the COVID-19 activity level every six to nine months. However, the timing of the increase in the activity level of COVID-19 may vary from region to region depending on local factors, such as the herd immunity of the population and changes in the circulating strains and vaccination rates," said the Controller of the CHP, Dr Edwin Tsui.

"Hong Kong has experienced an upsurge in COVID-19 cases since April this year, more than half a year after the last increase in July and August of last year. This increase is expected and similar to last year's increase, with no unusual situations. Although some surveillance indicators suggest that the upward trend of COVID-19 has begun to slow down over the past week, we expect the activity level of COVID-19 to remain at a high levels in the coming few weeks," Dr Tsui said.

According to the latest surveillance data as of the week ending May 17, the increase in the viral load of the SARS-CoV-2 virus from sewage surveillance and the test positivity rate of respiratory samples have slowed down when compared to the past week. Among them, the percentage of respiratory samples testing positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus increased slightly from 13.66 per cent in the week ending May 10 to 13.8 per cent. For sewage surveillance, the per capita viral load of SARS-CoV-2 virus increased from around 710 000 copy/litre to 770 000 copy/litre, but the rate of increase was significantly lower than that of the previous two weeks.

The upsurge of COVID-19 cases in the last one or two months is a regional phenomenon. Neighbouring areas such as Singapore, Thailand, Mainland China and Taiwan have also recorded a similar increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. Japan and Korea experienced upsurges of COVID-19 cases from January to February and from March to April this year respectively, and these surges have already slowed down. In North America and Europe, the activity level of COVID-19 peaked in the third quarter of last year, then declined in

the fourth quarter, and has remained relatively stable so far this year.

"In general, the symptoms of COVID-19 infection in the general public are mostly mild, similar to other common respiratory infections. There is no need for the public to be overly concerned. However, high-risk groups (including the elderly and young children, persons with underlying illnesses and persons who are immunocompromised) are more likely to develop severe symptoms. Therefore, COVID-19 vaccination is important to protect these high-risk populations," Dr Tsui added.

Apart from vaccination, the public should maintain stringent personal, environmental and hand hygiene at all times to minimise the risk of contracting COVID-19 and other respiratory infectious diseases. When respiratory symptoms appear, one should wear a surgical mask, consider avoiding going to work or school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

For the latest surveillance data, members of the public can refer to the CHP's weekly [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#). For more information on vaccination, please refer to the [COVID-19 Vaccination Programme webpage](#).