

Public urged to continue their vigilance against influenza as school will soon resume after LNY holiday

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (February 8) urged schools, parents and students to continue to heighten vigilance and to adopt strict personal and environmental hygiene to prevent the spread of seasonal influenza in schools as social contacts among students in schools will increase when school soon resumes after the Lunar New Year holiday.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "As schools are collective assembly places, infectious diseases including influenza could be easily spread among people through their daily contacts. In view of this, we will issue letters to schools, kindergartens and child care centres again today to remind them on continued vigilance and reinforcement of preventive measures when school resumes to mitigate the impact of influenza."

To prevent outbreaks of influenza and other respiratory infections, it is of prime importance that children with fever, regardless of the presence of respiratory symptoms, should not be allowed to attend school. They should seek medical advice and avoid school till 48 hours after the fever has subsided. During the influenza season, schools should actively check the body temperature of all students every day when they arrive at school so as to identify students with fever. Schools should also follow the [Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases](#) on preventive and control measures as well as management of outbreaks. If an outbreak is suspected, schools should immediately report it to the CHP for prompt follow-up.

The spokesman said, "According to the latest surveillance data of the CHP, the local influenza activity has continued to decrease from the peak level recorded during January 13 to 26. This winter influenza season in Hong Kong is expected to last for some time."

The percentage that tested positive for seasonal influenza viruses among the respiratory specimens received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch has further decreased from 25.89 per cent in the week ending January 26 to 20.06 per cent in that ending February 2.

The CHP has also recorded a significant drop in institutional influenza-like illness outbreaks, from the peak of 211 cases (affecting 1,010 persons) in the week ending January 26 to 31 cases (affecting 127 persons) in that ending February 2.

Meanwhile, the overall admission rate with principal diagnosis of influenza in public hospitals further decreased from 1.33 to 0.77 cases per 10,000 of the population from the week ending January 26 to that ending February 2. Among children aged below 6, the rate went down from 8.10 to 4.36

cases per 10,000 of the population in the corresponding period.

As for children (aged under 18), 21 severe cases (including one death) were reported this year as of February 7. Among the cases, 16 (about 76 per cent) did not receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) for the current season.

The CHP once again appealed to parents who have not yet arranged SIV for their children in this season to do so as early as possible to strengthen their personal protection.

The public should also maintain good personal and environmental hygiene for protection against influenza and other respiratory illnesses:

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70-80 per cent alcohol-based handrub as an effective alternative;
- Cover the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin;
- Put on a surgical mask when respiratory symptoms develop;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When influenza is prevalent, avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places; high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks in such places; and
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

For the latest information on influenza activity, please visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and weekly [Flu Express](#).