

Public urged to stay vigilant against infectious diseases in Easter and rainy season

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (April 12) reminded members of the public who intend to travel during Easter holidays to stay alert to the situation of infectious diseases in their destinations, and with the approach of the rainy season, they are urged to adopt necessary precautions to guard against mosquito-borne diseases whether locally or abroad.

"Members of the public should adopt anti-mosquito measures and remove stagnant water and clear rubbish to prevent mosquito breeding in and around your home with the approach of the rainy season," a spokesman for the CHP said.

There are many mosquito-borne diseases, including dengue fever (DF), Japanese encephalitis (JE), malaria, yellow fever and Zika virus infection (ZVI). To prevent mosquito-borne diseases, travellers should wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or exposed parts of the body. Travellers returning from areas affected by DF and ZVI should apply insect repellent for 14 days or at least 21 days respectively upon arrival in Hong Kong.

Regarding the latest DF situation in Hong Kong, from April 4 to 11, the CHP recorded four imported DF cases. The patients had been to Cambodia (one case), Indonesia (one case), Malaysia (one case) and Sri Lanka (one case) during the incubation period.

As of April 11, the CHP had recorded a total of 39 confirmed cases in 2019, all of which were imported cases. The cases were mainly imported from Indonesia (eight cases), Malaysia (eight cases) and Thailand (six cases).

DF remains endemic in some areas in Asia and beyond. The latest figures for 2019 revealed that 14 774 cases had been recorded in Thailand, 48 634 in the Philippines, 31 901 in Malaysia (which was 2.5 times the number of cases reported in the same period in 2018), 2 423 in Singapore (since December 30, 2018), 44 404 in Vietnam (which was 3.6 times the number of cases reported in the same period in 2018) and 71 in Japan. In the Americas, the latest figures indicated that 9 585 cases were filed in Mexico in 2019.

For ZVI, no local cases have been recorded by the CHP to date. Due to the high volume of international travel, there is always a risk of importation of ZVI to Hong Kong. As the mosquito *Aedes albopictus* is commonly found locally, there is also the risk of local spread if ZVI is imported into Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, members of the public should also pay attention to cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) abroad. The spokesman pointed out that as countries in the Middle East, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time, travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients.

Scientific evidence showed that camels are reservoirs for MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through nasal and eye discharge, faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus may also be found in the raw organs and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best protection is to practise good hygiene and avoid direct contact with all of these.

"From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involved patients with history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV," the spokesman said.

If returning travellers develop any symptoms, they should seek medical advice immediately and report their travel history to the healthcare professionals. Moreover, members of the general public should always take the following measures to prevent respiratory and other infections:

- 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 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 develop respiratory symptoms;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation; and
- Avoid going to crowded or poorly ventilated public places; high-risk individuals may consider putting on surgical masks in such places.

The public may also visit the CHP's pages on [DF](#), [ZVI](#) and [MERS](#) for more information.