

CHP reminds public on precautions against cold weather

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 30) reminded the public, particularly the elderly and people with chronic illnesses, to adopt appropriate measures to protect their health in view of the cold weather.

A spokesman for the CHP said that cold weather can easily trigger or exacerbate diseases, especially among the elderly and persons suffering from heart disease, respiratory illness or other chronic illnesses.

"Elderly people have less insulating fat beneath their skin to keep them warm and their body temperature control mechanism may be weaker. Their body may not be able to appropriately respond to the cold weather," the spokesman said.

Some senior persons may have decreased mobility, which can in turn slow down their ability to generate and conserve body heat. Chronic illnesses, such as hypertension, diabetes and endocrine disorders, may undermine the health of elderly people and lower their metabolic rate, subsequently causing their body to generate less heat.

The CHP reminded the public, in particular the elderly and persons with chronic illnesses, to adopt the following preventive measures:

- Take note of the weather forecast. Wear warm clothing, including hats, scarves, gloves and socks accordingly;
- Consume sufficient food to ensure adequate calorie intake;
- Perform regular exercise to facilitate blood circulation and heat production;
- Stay in a warm environment and avoid prolonged outdoor exposure;
- Use heaters with care and maintain adequate indoor ventilation; and
- Seek medical advice if feeling unwell.

In addition, the public should avoid alcoholic beverages.

"Drinking alcohol cannot keep you warm. Alcohol accelerates the loss of body heat through dilated blood vessels, resulting in chilling instead," the spokesman said.

"Parents should ensure that babies are sufficiently warm, but it is also important to keep babies lightly clothed to avoid overheating them," the spokesman added.

Parents should observe the following safety measures when putting their children to bed:

- Keep the room well ventilated and with a comfortable temperature;
- Always place babies on their back to sleep. Babies usually sleep well

without a pillow;

- Place babies on a firm and well-fitted mattress to sleep. Avoid soft objects and loose bedding;
- Leave their head, face and arms uncovered during sleep; and
- Let babies sleep in a cot placed in the parents' room and near their bed.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They should adhere to the following advice:

- A surgical mask can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;
- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.
- Receive seasonal influenza vaccination, which is recommended for all persons aged 6 months or above except those with known contraindications; and
- Persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive seasonal influenza vaccination early. Please see details of the vaccination programmes and scheme on the CHP's website.

Food-borne diseases, particularly those linked to hot pot cuisine, are also common in cold weather. The following preventive measures should be taken:

- Wash hands before handling and consuming food;
- Do not patronise unlicensed vendors or those with poor hygienic standards while selecting food;

- Wash and cook all food thoroughly;
- Vegetables should be washed thoroughly in clean running water before cooking and consumption. When appropriate, scrub vegetables with hard surfaces with a clean brush to remove dirt and substances, including pesticide residues and contaminants, from the surface and crevices;
- Shrimps should be fully cooked by cooking them until the shells turn red and the flesh turns white and opaque;
- For shellfish like scallops and geoduck, scrub the shells thoroughly and remove internal organs;
- Most hot pot ingredients should be stored in a refrigerator at 4 degrees Celsius or below, while frozen food should be stored in a freezer at -18 degrees C or below;
- Never use raw eggs as a dipping sauce for hot pot; and
- Use different sets of chopsticks to handle raw and cooked food to avoid cross-contamination.

In addition, the public should not use charcoal as a cooking fuel in poorly ventilated areas, especially indoors, to avoid harmful exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) and prevent CO poisoning. While using other kinds of fuel, the public should also ensure adequate ventilation.

For more health information, the public may call the DH's Health Education Hotline (2833 0111) or visit the [CHP's website](#) and [Facebook Fanpage](#).

The public may also call Dial-a-Weather (1878 200) or visit the website of the [Hong Kong Observatory](#) for the latest weather information and forecast, or its page on [Weather Information for Senior Citizens](#).

[Red fire danger warning](#)

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

The fire danger situation today (December 30) is red and fire risk is extreme. The countryside is extremely vulnerable to fire. If you are planning to spend the day in the countryside, please take pre-cooked food for a picnic and take all measures to prevent hill fires. The penalty for lighting fires illegally in the countryside is \$25,000 and a year's imprisonment.

Territory-wide flag-selling activity cancelled

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been informed by the Boys' Brigade, Hong Kong that the territory-wide flag-selling activity in public places scheduled to be held today (December 30) has been cancelled, a spokesman for the SWD said.

Details of the charitable fund-raising activities covered by the Public Subscription Permit issued by the SWD, including any updated information, have been published on the GovHK website (www.gov.hk/en/theme/fundraising/search).

For enquiries, please contact Miss Lam of the organisation at 2273 0303.

FHB responds to media enquiries on specimen collection for COVID-19 test

In response to media enquiries regarding deep-throat saliva (DTS) specimens found not suitable for testing, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) responded on December 28 as follows:

The Government has been monitoring the latest developments of COVID-19 testing and making reference to scientific research, practical experience and expert opinions from various places and Hong Kong in selecting the appropriate specimen collection method for different testing schemes.

Currently, specimen collection for the purpose of compulsory testing has mostly adopted professional swab sampling of combined nasal and throat swab (CNTS) to ensure specimen quality. For instance, the Government sets up mobile specimen collection stations with professional swabbing service for virus testing near residential buildings of persons subject to compulsory testing specified under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J). For the free testing arranged by the Government for groups subject to compulsory testing such as staff of residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as taxi drivers, professional swab sampling (CNTS) is also adopted.

The 19 community testing centres which provide services to over 20 000 citizens per day and may issue testing certificates to citizens for travel purposes also adopt professional swab sampling as the specimen collection

method. The Hospital Authority (HA) also uses professional swab sampling (throat swab or nasopharyngeal aspirate) or collection of DTS under medical professionals' supervision for testing as a criterion in discharging from isolation condition.

To further prevent importation of cases, the temporary specimen collection centre set up at the Hong Kong International Airport has already adopted the specimen collection method of professional swab sampling (CNTS) for people arriving Hong Kong. As for people arriving Hong Kong from places outside China who are subject to compulsory quarantine, the sampling and testing required at designated quarantine hotels (including two tests on the 12th and 19th or 20th day of arrival in Hong Kong) will also adopt professional swab sampling.

From November 15 to December 22, a total of more than 450 000 tests have been carried out through the above-mentioned "compulsory testing", with professional swab sampling accounting for close to 60 per cent of the specimens tested. During the same period, the community testing centres' fee-paying testing service had provided professional swabbing service to over 220 000 persons, accounting for close to 50 per cent of the 1.36 million tests conducted in Hong Kong during that period.

Other community testing arrangement for surveillance purpose under "targeted testing" and "voluntary testing" for general public and targeted groups are conducted on voluntary basis. The Government would adopt different sampling methods, including distribution of DTS specimen bottles, having regard to the venue and other factors. In fact, through the 188 distribution points (including 47 designated general outpatient clinics under HA, 121 post offices or vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations) and 83 collection points for citizens to obtain free testing, it is indeed more convenient for citizens who feel that they are at a higher risk of infection or are mildly unwell to submit DTS samples. It would facilitate voluntary testing as well as "early identification, early isolation, early treatment" as recommended by overseas and local experts. From November 15 to December 22, we have distributed close to 540 000 specimen bottles through these distribution points and collected about 240 000 samples for testing. Among them, 238 positive cases were detected (0.10%).

DTS, nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) and combined nasal and throat swab (CNTS) are the most common specimen types used in Hong Kong for specimen collection. The three methods are generally on par in terms of accuracy and sensitivity, and have so far been effective in identifying COVID-19 cases. At present, the Government would select different specimen collection methods having regard to the actual situation, including factors such as testing purpose, site environment and convenience to the public, etc.

Government to gazette compulsory testing notice

The Government will exercise the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) and publish in the Gazette compulsory testing notice, which requires any person who had been present at Wing Shui House of Lek Yuen Estate in Sha Tin during the specified period (persons subject to compulsory testing) to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) said today (December 30), "A number of confirmed cases were recently found at Wing Shui House of Lek Yuen Estate in Sha Tin within a short period of time. Members of the public who had been to the relevant place might be subject to higher infection risks. The Government will publish a compulsory testing notice under Cap. 599J, which requires persons who had been to the above premises during the specified period to undergo testing immediately."

Details of persons subject to compulsory testing are as follows:

Any person who had been present at Wing Shui House of Lek Yuen Estate, 6 Lek Yuen Street, Sha Tin, for more than two hours at any time during the period from November 29 to December 29, 2020 (including but not limited to visitors, residents and workers)

Persons subject to compulsory testing have to undergo testing by January 1, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing have previously undergone testing between December 25 and December 29, they would be taken to have complied with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notice.

"Based on recent experience, persons subject to compulsory testing would feel more relieved if they receive SMS (mobile phone text message) confirming the negative results of the tests. Such SMS can also facilitate law enforcement. Therefore, the Government has updated the testing routes applicable to compulsory testing notices, which only include those where SMS confirming negative test results would be issued to persons who underwent testing afterwards. The community testing centre in Lek Yuen Community Hall, Sha Tin will provide free testing services to residents and workers of Lek Yuen Estate."

Persons subject to compulsory testing may choose to undergo testing via the following routes:

1. To visit any mobile specimen collection stations (see the list and target groups (if applicable) at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html) for testing;
2. To attend any community testing centres (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en);

3. To obtain a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 121 post offices, vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations or 47 designated general outpatient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority and return the specimen to the designated specimen collection points (see the distribution points and time, and the specimen collection points and time at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);
4. To undergo testing at any GOPCs of the Hospital Authority as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority;
5. To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories which are recognised by the Department of Health and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories RTPCR.pdf); or
6. To use a specimen bottle distributed to the relevant specified premises by the Centre for Health Protection, and return the specimen bottle with the sample collected as per the relevant guidelines.

The spokesman cautioned that testing received at accident and emergency departments of the Hospital Authority or during hospital stays, or testing provided by private laboratories which cannot issue SMS notifications in respect of test results, does not comply with the requirements of the aforementioned compulsory testing notice.

"If persons subject to compulsory testing have symptoms, they should seek medical attention immediately and undergo testing as instructed by a medical professional. They should not attend the mobile specimen collection stations or the community testing centres."

Persons subject to compulsory testing must keep the SMS notification containing the result of the test for checking by a law enforcement officer when the officer requires the persons to provide information about their undergoing the specified test.

Furthermore, persons subject to testing under the compulsory testing notice should, as far as reasonably practicable, take appropriate personal disease prevention measures including wearing a mask and maintaining hand hygiene; and unless for the purpose of undergoing the specified test, stay at their place of residence and avoid going out until the test result is ascertained as far as possible.

Any enquiries on compulsory testing arrangements may be addressed to the hotline at 6275 6901 which operates daily from 9am to 6pm. If persons subject to compulsory testing plan to conduct testing at any of the community testing centres, they can check the centre's appointment status in advance. The hotlines of the community testing centres are at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/info.

The Government will continue to trace possibly infected persons who had been to the relevant premises, and seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notice. Any person who fails to comply with the testing

notice commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

The spokesman said, "The Government urges all individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, or individuals with infection risks (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases), to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons. The FHB will publish compulsory testing notices regarding particular groups when necessary taking into account the epidemic development and the testing participation rate."