

Boy recovering from H5N1

The Department of Health (DH) is investigating a case of influenza A H5N1 infection in a nine-year-old boy who visited his relatives in Fujian earlier this year.

The boy developed fever, cough and runny nose on February 9 and returned to Hong Kong on February 10. He was admitted to Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) on February 12. He is in stable condition now.

Consultant in-charge of DH's Disease Prevention and Control Division, Dr Tse Lai-yin, said today (February 19) that a nasopharyngeal aspirate taken from the boy was tested positive for influenza (H5N1) by the Government Virus Unit. Test by the University of Hong Kong also showed the same results. The virus isolated was different from the 1997 strains that infected humans.

Investigation by the DH revealed that the boy went to Fujian in January with his mother and his two sisters. One of his sisters, aged 8, developed pneumonia on January 28 in Fujian. She was admitted to a local hospital but eventually died on February 4. Her cause of death could not be identified.

The boy's mother, aged 30, developed parainfluenza virus infection after the trip and has recovered.

The boy's father, who joined them in Fujian on January 31, also developed pneumonia since February 7. He returned to Hong Kong on February 10 for treatment. He was admitted to PMH on February 11 but died on February 17.

"DH has stepped up its surveillance system further by testing all severe pneumonia cases for H5. So far, we have no other positive results," Dr Tse said.

"DH is also closely liaising with the Mainland authorities, the University of Hong Kong and the Hospital Authority to monitor the situation."

Dr Tse advised members of the public that the best way to combat influenza infection was to build up body resistance by having a proper diet with adequate exercise and rest.

"Good ventilation should be maintained to avoid the spread of respiratory tract infection.

"Members of the public should seek medical consultations promptly if they develop influenza-like illness," Dr Tse said.

"Members of the public should also avoid direct contact with poultry and birds, and if contacts have been made, they should wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Dr Tse stressed that members of the public should not panic as DH's influenza surveillance system did not show any unusual increase in influenza activity over the past few weeks nor detect any other H5 virus.

The number of hospital admissions for pneumonia has remained stable.

End/Wednesday, February 19, 2003

NNNN