

Legislative Council Panel on Health Services

Notification Mechanism on Infectious Diseases between Guangdong Province and Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper provides an update on the notification mechanism on infectious diseases between Guangdong Province and Hong Kong.

Existing Notification Mechanism

2. The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreaks in Guangdong and Hong Kong last year called for urgent actions to establish more effective communication channels between the two places to enable timely exchange of important information about infectious disease incidents and outbreaks. Experts from Guangdong Province and Hong Kong agreed in April 2003 to enhance the SARS notification mechanism for regular exchange of latest information, including statistics, clinical treatment, epidemiological and progress of research. The arrangement was subsequently extended to cover Macao in May 2003.

3. The Tripartite Meeting of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Expert Group on Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases met several times since May 2003 and agreed to enhance cooperation in the following areas:

- exchanging information about statutory notifiable diseases of the three places on a monthly basis, and infectious diseases of concern as and when necessary;
- promptly reporting among the three places sudden upsurge of infectious diseases of unknown nature or of public health

significance. For example, the report from the Guangdong Province Health Department to the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Beijing would be sent to the Department of Health (DH) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in parallel;

- establishing a point-to-point communication via phone and/or fax; and
- arranging mutual visits to deepen each others' understanding of public health work on infectious diseases.

4. Regular reporting has been maintained between Guangdong and Hong Kong regarding the latest SARS situation. In view of the occurrence of new SARS cases in Guangdong Province since late December 2003, DH has been communicating with the Guangdong Province Health Department on a daily basis for the most updated SARS situation there.

Report of SARS Cases in Guangdong Province

5. Four SARS cases have been reported by Guangdong authorities since late December 2003. DH was notified of the first three as suspected SARS cases on 26 December 2003, 8 January 2004 and 11 January 2004 respectively. Notifications of their confirmed status were received on 5 January for the first case, and on 17 January 2004 for the second and third cases.

The Fourth SARS Case in Guangdong

6. On 27 January 2004, the Government Virus Unit (GVU) of DH received a request from the Guangdong Province Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for SARS coronavirus testing on the clinical specimens from a 40-year-old health care worker with pneumonia in Guangzhou. In response to the enquiry from DH, the Guangdong Province Health Department advised that the case had not been classified as suspected or confirmed SARS, pending further laboratory tests by China CDC and GVU. All contacts under medical surveillance were

asymptomatic.

7. Daily follow up with the Guangdong Province Health Department and MOH in Beijing confirmed that there was no new suspected or confirmed SARS case or human avian influenza apart from the first three SARS cases reported earlier on.

8. In the afternoon of 30 January 2004, GVU of DH reported the test results to the Guangdong Province CDC. On 31 January 2004, the Guangdong Province Health Department notified DH that the pneumonia patient was classified as a confirmed SARS case and that a press release would soon be issued.

Actions Taken by DH

9. In the light of public concern on the notification mechanism with Guangdong, DH has written to MOH in Beijing and the Guangdong Province Health Department to remind them of the need to keep DH informed of any suspected and confirmed SARS case. The Administration will continue to liaise with the Mainland health authorities for the betterment of the notification mechanism.

Department of Health
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