



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

10 July 2019

Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attention: Miss Josephine SO)

Dear Miss SO,

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Letter from Hon Vincent CHENG**

Thank you for your letter of 29 May 2019. In consultation with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Department of Health, our response to the letter from Hon Vincent Cheng (LC Paper No. CB(2)1552/18-19(01)) is at **Annex**.

Yours sincerely,

[Signed]

(Nicole LEE)

for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.

Food and Health Bureau (Health Branch) (Attn.: Mr Ronald Ho)
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Attn.: Mr Fork Ping Lam)

Government's Response

Hepatitis E is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis E virus ("HEV"). High-risk individuals such as elderly with major underlying illnesses (especially transplant patients), pregnant women, people with chronic liver diseases and glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase ("G6PD") deficiency may develop severe illness when having HEV infection. Therefore, they should be more vigilant of personal, food and environmental hygiene.

A total of six cases of human infection of rat HEV have been recorded by the Department of Health ("DH") since 2018. The six cases involved five males and one female, aged between 56 and 81. Patients in all cases had underlying illnesses. Among them, a 74-year-old patient was admitted to Tuen Mun Hospital due to underlying illnesses on 28 April 2019 and passed away on 4 May due to an unrelated cause. The remaining five cases were in stable condition. Investigations by the DH revealed that they were all sporadic cases with no epidemiological linkage, and the patients' home contacts have remained asymptomatic.

According to the DH's epidemiological investigations, the two patients identified in 2018 and one patient identified in June 2019 resided in different areas of Wong Tai Sin, while the three patients identified in May this year resided in Kowloon City, Southern District and Tuen Mun, respectively. One patient had travelled to Taiwan and Korea during the incubation period while the other five patients had no travel history during the incubation period. All six patients did not recall having direct contact with rodents or their excreta. One of the patients reported seeing suspected rodent excreta in his residence while the other one had seen rodents in the vicinity of a restaurant he frequently visited. The DH's epidemiological investigations have yet to determine the source and the route of infection.

The usual HEV causing human infection is mainly transmitted through the faecal-oral route, for example, due to faecal contamination of drinking water. Besides, since HEV has been detected in pig livers, foodborne transmission of HEV can result from ingestion of undercooked

meat or meat products produced from infected animals. As for rat HEV, there is no scientific information to determine the exact mode of transmission to human at the moment. Possible routes of transmission include ingestion of food or water contaminated by rodents or their excreta, exposure to environments or objects contaminated by rodents or their excreta and direct contact with rodents or their excreta.

The Government has taken a series of prevention and control measures to follow up on the cases of human infection of rat HEV. The DH has all along been disseminating health information, including preventive measures of hepatitis E, to members of the public and relevant stakeholders through different channels, including the website of the Centre for Health Protection (“CHP”) of the DH. The DH has also published related articles on hepatitis E in its bi-weekly online publication “Communicable Diseases Watch” from time to time in order to provide healthcare professionals and members of the public with up-to-date information on hepatitis E. Meanwhile, the DH has also produced a variety of health education materials to raise public awareness in maintaining good personal, food and environmental hygiene.

The DH would inform the Pest Control Advisory Section of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”) of cases of human infection with rat HEV in order to carry out rodent survey and control measures as appropriate. The DH will also continue to work with the Department of Microbiology of The University of Hong Kong to conduct further analysis on samples collected from patients with rat HEV infection.

In addition, the DH issued press releases on 14 May 2019 and 28 June 2019 to inform members of the public the situation of human infection with rat HEV and the preventive measures, and remind them to maintain good personal, food and environmental hygiene. Furthermore, the DH issued a letter to all local doctors and hospitals on 17 May to inform them of relevant situation and preventive measures and remind them to pay special attention to immunocompromised persons with liver function derangement.

The DH has also communicated with the World Health Organization (“WHO”) regarding the global situation of human infection

with rat HEV. According to the WHO's preliminary reply, no acute case of human infection with rat HEV has been reported in Europe at the moment. Separately, the presence of rat HEV in rat populations in Europe has been demonstrated in research. The DH will continue to closely monitor the global situation of human infection with rat HEV.

As for the Government's measures on rodent disinfestation, the Government has launched a three-month territory-wide cleaning campaign on 20 May 2019, targeting areas such as rear lanes, housing estates, food premises and public markets. Cleaning work and enhanced enforcement actions have been carried out and public education and publicity in this regard have also been strengthened. All departments will remain vigilant and work together for effective rodent prevention and control.

In addition, the Pest Control Steering Committee held meetings on 17 May 2019 and 20 June 2019 to discuss strategies on enhanced cleansing and rodent control work and reviewed the effectiveness of departments' work.

Apart from government efforts, the collaboration between the public and private sectors (food premises in particular) to eliminate the conditions for rodents to survive at source is of paramount importance to effective prevention of rodent infestation. The Government will strengthen its collaboration with various District Councils and urge the public to maintain environment and personal hygiene constantly and to actively participate in rodent prevention and control work. The Government will consolidate the experience it has gained from this three-month territory-wide cleaning campaign, and continue with its on-going rodent prevention and control work.