



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

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電話號碼 Tel: 3509 8955
傳真號碼 Fax: 2840 0467

12 December 2019

Clerk to Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Maisie Lam)

Dear Ms Lam,

Panel on Health Services
Letter from Prof Hon Joseph Lee Kok-long

Thank you for your letter of 3 December 2019. Our response to the letter dated 2 December 2019 from Prof Hon Joseph Lee Kok-long to the Chairman of the Panel on Health Services on issues relating to plague is at **Annex**.

Yours sincerely,

(Ronald Ho)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.

Food and Health Bureau (Food Branch) (Attn.: Miss Nicole Lee)
Secretary for Food and Health's Office (Attn.: Ms Eppie Cheng)
Director of Health (Attn.: Dr Albert Au)

Government's Response

Background information about plague

Plague is a communicable disease that affects rodents (including rats), some animals and humans. It is caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, which is transmitted from an infected animal (mainly rodent) to humans through the bite of infected animal's fleas. Besides, people can also contract plague when cuts or other breaks in their skin come into contact with the body fluid or tissue of infected animals, or through inhalation of respiratory droplets from infected patients. There are three main forms of plague infection: bubonic, pneumonic and septicaemic. Plague patients should be isolated and treated with appropriate antibiotics. According to information of the Department of Health ("DH"), no plague cases were recorded in Hong Kong after 1929.

Recent situation of plague in the Mainland

2. Regarding the recent plague cases that occurred in the Mainland, the Centre for Health Protection ("CHP") of the DH has closely communicated with the National Health Commission ("NHC") to obtain information on the latest situation for risk assessment. Since November 2019, four cases of plague infected in Inner Mongolia have been confirmed in the Mainland. These include two cases of pneumonic plague confirmed in Beijing, involving a couple from Inner Mongolia; and two cases of bubonic plague confirmed in Inner Mongolia. The CHP issued press releases on these cases on 14¹, 18² and 29³ November 2019 respectively to urge the community to heighten their vigilance against plague. According to the latest information from the NHC and the Health Commission of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, all close contacts of the four patients remained asymptomatic and were released from medical surveillance. Apart from the above four plague cases, no additional cases have been reported in the Mainland thereafter. The CHP will maintain close liaison with the NHC to monitor the latest situation of plague in the Mainland.

¹ Please refer to relevant press release (<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201911/14/P2019111400670.htm>) for details.

² Please refer to relevant press release (<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201911/18/P2019111800782.htm>) for details.

³ Please refer to relevant press release (<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201911/29/P2019112900544.htm>) for details.

Local preventive and control measures for plague

Disease surveillance

3. The CHP is highly concerned about the prevention and control of plague, and a series of preventive and control measures are in place. Plague is a notifiable disease under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599). All registered medical practitioners are required to notify the CHP of all suspected or confirmed cases of plague. In response to notification of a human plague case, the CHP will carry out prompt epidemiological investigation and control measures including source finding and contact tracing. The CHP will arrange the case to be isolated in a public hospital for treatment, and liaise with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”) to carry out control measure including vector surveillance and anti-rodent measures.

Risk communication

4. The CHP closely monitors the global situation of plague and disseminates outbreak news on plague through the website of the Travel Health Service (<https://www.travelhealth.gov.hk>). If necessary, the CHP will timely step up the risk communication by issuing press release, holding press briefing and issuing letters to alerting local doctors and hospitals to alert them to the latest situation of plague.

Port health measures

5. The Port Health Division of the CHP carries out regular inspections at boundary control points (“BCPs”) to ensure that good environmental hygiene is maintained and proper rodent control measures are in place. Temperature checks by thermal imaging systems are conducted on an ongoing basis for inbound travellers at all BCPs and suspected plague cases will be referred to public hospitals for isolation, management and follow-up.

Emergency preparedness

6. To enhance the overall preparedness and response for public health crisis for communicable diseases with public health significance, the DH has developed contingency plans and conducted exercises and drills to test the preparedness of relevant government departments and organisations to cope with possible major outbreaks of infectious diseases in Hong Kong, in order to

enhance community and healthcare personnel awareness, preparedness and the ability to detect and respond to possible epidemics.

Health education

7. The CHP has all along been disseminating health information, including preventive measures of plague, to members of the public through different channels, including printed health education materials, social media and website. The preventive measures of plague and related information are available on the CHP's designated webpage (<https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102387.html>). The CHP will continue to use various channels to disseminate preventive information including travel health advice, avoiding flea bite/rodent and pest control measures:

- In our living environment, eliminate sources of food and nesting places for rodents;
- In terms of personal protection, members of public should prevent flea bites by wearing long-sleeved shirts and trousers, and applying DEET-containing insect repellent to exposed skin and surface of clothes; and
- If travelling to plague endemic areas, avoid visiting rat-infested places and never contact live or dead rodents or contaminated materials; avoid going to rural areas, camping or hunting; and take protective measures to prevent flea bites. In case of sudden symptoms of fever, chills, painful lumps, or shortness of breath with coughing and/or blood-tainted sputum after visiting plague-affected areas, travellers should seek medical care immediately.

Anti-rodent work

8. The Government launched a half year long territory-wide cleaning campaign in May 2019, requiring various government departments to strengthen their cleaning and anti-rodent work. Among these, the FEHD, Home Affairs Department and Highways Department have, through intelligence exchanges, carried out improvement works and enhanced cleaning at back alleys where there are hygiene problems. The Hong Kong Housing Authority, with FEHD's technical support, has installed rodent-proofing structures in public housing estates. The Buildings Department and the Architectural Services Department have also promulgated guidelines on incorporating rodent-proofing design in new buildings for building professionals' reference. These guidelines will also serve as reference for renovation of old buildings. In addition, the FEHD has stepped up enforcement against irregularities of food premises such as food preparation at rear lanes.