

25 March 2003

2867 2547

To : Chief Executive of all authorized insurers

Dear Sir / Madam,

Atypical Pneumonia

In view of a recent outbreak of severe respiratory syndrome in Hong Kong, I write to provide general information on Atypical Pneumonia (非典型肺炎) and the recommended precautionary measures. Please also draw the attention of your staff and appointed insurance agents to this letter.

Background

Since 10 March 2003, an outbreak of severe respiratory syndrome occurred in Hong Kong affecting mainly health care workers and close contacts of patients. The main presenting symptoms included high fever ($> 38^{\circ}$ Celsius), dry cough, shortness of breath or breathing difficulties. Changes in chest X-rays indicative of pneumonia also occur. Severe respiratory syndrome may be associated with other symptoms, including headache, muscular stiffness, loss of appetite, malaise, confusion, rash and diarrhoea.

According to the Department of Health, the available evidence suggests that close contact with an infected person is needed for the infective agent to spread from one person to another. Close contact with aerosolized droplets and bodily secretions from an infected person appears to be important. To date, the majority of cases have occurred in hospital workers who have cared for severe respiratory syndrome patients and the close family members of these patients. However, the amount of the infective agent needed to cause an infection has not yet been determined.

Advice from the Department of Health

The Department of Health offers the following advice :-

- Consult a doctor immediately if falling sick and take leave as appropriate.
- Persons with symptoms of respiratory infection should be advised to wear a mask to reduce the chance of spread of the infection, and the staff handling these persons are advised to wear a disposable surgical mask and sterile disposable gloves, and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately afterwards.
- If wearing masks, ensure that it fits snugly over the nose and face area.
- Except for the health care setting, brief encounter with clients over the counters do not particularly expose the counter staff to a higher risk of infection, and in general, wearing of facemasks while performing counter duties is considered not necessary.
- The following precautionary measures are recommended:

Personal

- Build up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking.
- Maintain good personal hygiene, cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing and wash hands after sneezing, coughing, cleaning the nose or going to toilets.
- Use serving utensils at meal times to avoid spread of the virus.
- Avoid visiting crowded places with poor ventilation.

Environment

- Maintain good ventilation.
- If the facilities are mechanically ventilated, ensure frequent air exchanges and proper maintenance and cleansing of the system.

- Cleanse and disinfect the facilities (including telephone, furniture and toilet facilities) regularly (at least once a day), using 1:99 diluted household bleach (i.e. adding 1 part of household bleach to 99 parts of water), rinse with water and then mop dry.
- If the facilities are contaminated with vomitus, disinfect immediately with 1:49 diluted household bleach (i.e. adding 1 part of household bleach to 49 parts of water), rinse with water and then mop dry.
- Anyone who would like to obtain more information on the disease may visit the website of the Department of Health at www.info.gov.hk/dh or make enquiries with its hotline on 187 2222.

Yours sincerely,

(Benjamin Tang)
Commissioner of Insurance

c.c. Chairman, The Hong Kong Federation of Insurers