

## Exercise 'Sapphire' tests government response to outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis

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The Government tested its preparedness for a possible outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis today (November 9) during an exercise code-named "Sapphire", organised by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) in collaboration with other government departments and organisations at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (KTCT).

The exercise aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the Government's plans and procedures and the interoperability of governmental departments and agencies in response to communicable disease outbreaks on board cross-boundary cruise ships, as well as heightening the overall awareness and readiness of relevant stakeholders in preventing the international spread of disease and protecting Hong Kong.

The exercise consisted of two parts. The first part was a table-top exercise conducted on October 29, in which relevant departments and organisations discussed and commanded response measures in a simulated outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis.

The second part conducted today was a ground exercise. Under the exercise simulation, a cross-boundary cruise ship was heading towards Hong Kong and scheduled to berth at the KTCT. The shipping agency was informed that about 30 passengers and crew members developed symptoms of vomiting, diarrhoea and fever.

The DH then activated the emergency response mechanism and formed the Public Health Incident Assessment Group (PHIAG) with relevant departments and agencies, disciplinary services, terminal operators and the shipping agency to operate and formulate a response plan before the ship's arrival.

Upon the ship's arrival, the DH convened a Public Health Team to conduct on-board assessment and epidemiological investigation.

The PHIAG also co-ordinated multi-agency efforts in the transfer of sick passengers and crew, implementation of special immigration and customs clearance for hospitalised passengers, and disinfection of the cruise ship and the terminal building.

"The exercise provided a valuable opportunity for relevant parties to strengthen their preparedness and identify areas for improvement. It also helped enhance the preparedness of relevant stakeholders to respond to any possible future outbreak of communicable disease," a spokesman for the DH said.

"We will continue to conduct interdepartmental exercises with government bureaux/departments, organisations and stakeholders concerned in close partnership," the spokesman added.

About 50 representatives from relevant government departments and organisations took part in the exercise today, involving the Customs and Excise Department, the DH, the Fire Services Department, the Immigration Department, the Marine Department, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Tourism Commission, the terminal operator and the shipping agent.

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Department of Health