Causative agent
Influenza is a highly infectious viral disease. It is caused by various types of influenza viral strains. Three types of influenza viruses are recognized: A, B and C. Type A is more common. In Hong Kong, the two subtypes of influenza A, H1N1 and H3N2, are most commonly seen. Emergence of new subtypes occurs from time to time at irregular intervals, which is responsible for widespread outbreaks and makes periodic reformulation of the influenza vaccine necessary. In Hong Kong, the disease is more prevalent in periods from January to March and from July to August.

Mode of transmission
The disease is mainly spread through droplets in crowded and enclosed spaces. The infection may also be spread from person to person by direct contact with the secretions of infected persons.

Incubation period
The incubation period is short, usually around 1 to 3 days.

Clinical features
Influenza is an acute illness of the respiratory tract, characterized by:
- fever
- headache
- muscle ache
- runny nose
- cough and sore throat
- other symptoms may include stuffy nose, tiredness, diarrhea and vomiting

Complications
- Complications are common among those with weak body resistance.
- Serious complications include bronchitis and pneumonia.

Prevention
Observe personal hygiene
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly.
- Wash hands promptly if they are contaminated by respiratory tract secretions, e.g. after sneezing.
- Cover mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing.
- No spitting. Always wrap nasal and mouth discharges with tissue paper, and dispose of the tissue paper properly in rubbish bin.
- Wear mask when symptoms of respiratory tract infection or fever develop.
  Seek medical advice promptly. Refrain from work or school if develop symptoms of flu.
- Build up body resistance to prevent influenza infection. To do so, maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly and have plenty of rest, and avoid overstress and smoking.

Observe environmental hygiene
- Maintain good ventilation of indoor areas.
- When influenza is prevalent, avoid attending crowded and poorly ventilated public places, such as restaurants and shopping centres.
Vaccination

- Influenza vaccine is prepared according to the virus strains prevalent in the community each year, as recommended by the World Health Organization.

Centre for Health Protection Website
www.chp.gov.hk

24- Hour Health Education Hotline of the Department of Health
2833 0111