



Department of Health

The Department of Health was established in 1989 upon the re-organization of the Medical and Health Department. The Department operates with a budget of \$4.12 Billion (2009/10) and a workforce of about 5 200 civil servants comprising 75 grades and 148 ranks in October 2009. The annual client attendance was about 7.2 million in 2008.

MISSION

The Department of Health is the HKSAR Government's health advisor and agency to execute health care policies and statutory functions. It safeguards the health of the community through promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services. There are four core roles, namely, regulatory, advisory, health advocacy and promotion, and disease prevention and control.

REGULATORY ROLE

Port Health Office: The Port Health Office enforces the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance and observes the International Health Regulations in order to prevent the spread of infectious and other serious diseases into and out of Hong Kong via air, land or sea. The Office provides health clearance service and medical advice to vessels, responds to public health emergencies at airport, as well as provides travel health service at the Travel Health Centres.

Pharmaceutical Service: The Pharmaceutical Service ensures the safety, quality and efficacy of medicines used in Hong Kong. Acting on the authority of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board, the Pharmaceutical Service registers and approves the marketing of pharmaceutical products, issues license to drug manufacturers, importers, wholesalers and retailers.

Radiation Health Unit: The Radiation Health Unit is the Government's adviser on radiation safety and protection. It advises the Government on the protection of public health in nuclear incidents, management of radioactive materials and radioactive wastes, and the health effects of radiation fields. It serves as the executive arm of the Radiation Board to control the import, export, possession and use of radioactive substances and irradiating apparatus and safeguards occupational and public health through licensing control and inspection. It also provides radiation monitoring and health surveillance services for occupationally exposed persons and precision calibration of radiological monitoring instruments for instrument users.

Professional and healthcare institutions registration: Licensing of private hospitals and other health care institutions is undertaken by the Department of Health. The Department also provides secretariat support for the registration and professional regulation of healthcare

personnel, namely, medical practitioners, dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, occupational therapists, radiographers, optometrists, physiotherapists, medical laboratory technologists, chiropractors and Chinese medicine practitioners.

Chinese Medicine Division: Professional and administrative support is provided to the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong on devising and implementing regulatory measures for Chinese medicine practitioners, Chinese medicines traders and proprietary Chinese medicines. The Chinese Medicine Division also develops the Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards.

ADVISORY ROLE

The Department of Health has been providing health advice in support of the formulation of health policy and the work of other government bureaux and departments. In future, the advisory role of Department of Health will be expanded to support sectors outside the health settings. To take on the expanded advisory role, the Department of Health is establishing a Public Health Information System to collate and analyse data from services within and outside the health sector. The new system will generate information and identify key areas where maximum public health impact can be achieved with public health intervention.

ROLE OF DISEASE PREVENTION AND CONTROL

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP), established within the Department of Health on June 1, 2004, is vested with the responsibility and authority for the prevention and the control of communicable and non-communicable diseases. It is supported by six functional branches.

Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch: The Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch of the CHP maintains a comprehensive network of communicable disease notifications, conducts detailed epidemiological investigations on disease outbreaks, and institutes appropriate control measures and health advice to stop disease propagation. It also collects, collates, analyzes, and disseminates surveillance data on communicable diseases, develops and coordinates communicable disease surveillance system for the Pearl River Delta Region, and develops specialized expertise in the surveillance of targeted infections of public health importance. It is also responsible for surveillance and control of non-communicable diseases of significance to the Hong Kong population and formulation of strategies in relation to cancer prevention, cardiovascular health, and men's health, etc.

Public Health Laboratory Services Branch: The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the CHP provides

quality clinical diagnostic and public health laboratory services to the public and private health sectors. It comprises five functional Divisions, namely, Microbiology Division, Virology Division, Histopathology & Cytology Division, Chemical Pathology & Haematology Division and Neonatal Screening Division. They are centralized in the Public Health Laboratory Centre and the Clinical Pathology Laboratory Centre.

Infection Control Branch: In order to prevent and control diseases infection, the Infection Control Branch of the CHP plays an active role in developing, promulgating and evaluating best practices in infection control at health care and non-health care settings. The Branch also supports epidemiological investigations of communicable disease outbreaks in hospitals and training in infection control for all levels of health staff.

Tuberculosis and Chest Service: The Tuberculosis and Chest Service is one of the three services under the Public Health Services Branch of the CHP. It plays a key role in the prevention and control of tuberculosis. Its main activities cover the surveillance of tuberculosis, case finding, supervised chemotherapy, BCG vaccination for newborns, health education and research. The Service operates chest clinics providing out-patient service to patients suffering from tuberculosis and various chest diseases. It also runs a Pneumoconiosis Clinic which performs compensation assessment.

Special Preventive Programme for AIDS & Viral Hepatitis: Under the Public Health Services Branch of the CHP, the Special Preventive Programme (SPP) is responsible for the prevention, surveillance and clinical management of HIV/AIDS and the prevention of viral hepatitis in Hong Kong. Services ranges from hotlines, HIV counseling and testing, clinical consultations, treatment, nursing care to psychosocial support. The main HIV treatment service is provided at the Integrated Treatment Centre at Kowloon Bay Health Centre. The HIV prevention and health promotion programme is delivered largely by the Red Ribbon Centre.

Social Hygiene Service: The Social Hygiene Service under the Public Health Services Branch of the CHP is responsible for the prevention and control of sexually transmitted infections (STI). It also operates dermatology clinics for the management of skin diseases including leprosy. In the control of STI, social hygiene clinics provide walk-in service for consultation, counseling and medical treatment for patients with STIs. Staff of the Anti-Venereal Disease Office carry out contact tracing, health education and outreach activities to control the spread of STI.

Emergency Response and Information Branch: The Emergency Response and Information Branch of the CHP develops contingency plans and co-ordinates drills to increase the preparedness for public health crisis. At times of communicable disease outbreaks, it will act as the information coordinator to ensure the timeliness, responsiveness and consistency of information flow.

The Programme Management and Professional Development Branch: To collaborate with other health care professionals and organizations to provide evidence and science-based advices for formulating comprehensive and effective strategies and reinforcing the local health protection system, a three-tier Scientific Advisory Structure under the Programme Management and Professional Development Branch of the CHP was established. At the top is a Board of Scientific Advisers. The second tier consists of seven Scientific Committees which are supported by the third tier of Health Protection Programmes. The Branch also

oversees the strategic development of applied research projects in communicable diseases.

ROLE OF HEALTH ADVOCACY AND PROMOTION

The Central Health Education Unit promotes knowledge-based, needs-driven, effective and coordinated health promotion actions to influence and support the public in options that enhance health. It is also a resource centre of health education materials. The Community Liaison Division launches various community-based campaigns and activities to promote public health matters. The Division is also responsible for providing advice to the District Councils on health issues and strengthening communication with the community.

OTHER PREVENTIVE SERVICES

Family Health Service: The Family Health Service consists of Maternal and Child Health Service and Woman Health Service. The Maternal and Child Health Service includes antenatal and postnatal care, family planning and cervical screening services. Immunisation against childhood infectious diseases, health and developmental surveillance are offered to children. Anticipatory guidance on childcare and parenting are given to parents. For Woman Health Service, health education, counseling, physical examination and appropriate screening tests are provided to women to address their health needs. Health information on various child and woman health topics are made available to clients in different formats.

Student Health Service: The service aims to promote the health of school children. A comprehensive range of promotive and preventive services which cater for the health needs of the students at various stages of their development is provided at the student health service centres. Services include physical examination, health assessment, individual counselling and health education. Students found to have problems will be referred to a special assessment centre or appropriate specialists for further management.

Elderly Health Service: The Elderly Health Service promotes the health of the elderly population through operating elderly health centres and visiting health teams. The elderly health centres provide a comprehensive primary health care programme encompassing health assessment, counseling, curative treatment and health education to enrolled elderly aged 65 and above. Visiting health teams reach into the community and residential care settings to disseminate information on healthy ageing, offer professional advice to service providers, and provide support and training to carers of the elderly. The teams also conduct regular vaccination for high-risk groups.

Dental Service: Preventive and promotive oral health care services to the public are rendered through the School Dental Care Service (SDCS) and Oral Health Education Unit (OHEU). The SDCS promotes oral hygiene and provides basic and preventive dental care to primary school children through the school dental clinics. The OHEU promotes oral health to all sectors of the community through unit-based oral health education activities, school-based oral health promotion programmes and territory-wide Love Teeth Campaigns.

Tobacco Control Office: The mission of the Tobacco Control Office is to nurture a smoke-free culture in Hong Kong through intersectoral collaboration and community mobilization. The priority functions of the Tobacco Control Office are to enhance compliance with the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance and to assist the Food and Health Bureau in reviewing the tobacco control legislation.

Clinical Genetic Service: The Clinical Genetic Service provides territory-wide genetic service, including diagnosis, counseling and prevention of genetic diseases. It comprises the Genetic Counselling Unit which offers genetic counseling for families and the Genetic Screening Unit which operates two screening programmes for newborns, namely, glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency and congenital hypothyroidism.

Child Assessment Service: The Child Assessment Service operates seven centres to provide assessments for children from birth to 11 years old with developmental problems through a multidisciplinary team approach. The service also formulates rehabilitation plan after developmental diagnosis and provide support to parents through counselling, talks and support groups.

OTHER SERVICES

Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Service: The outpatient-based voluntary methadone treatment programme includes both maintenance and detoxification options for opiates abusers. It helps patients to lead a normal life and be gainfully employed. It also reduces the risk of drug overdose, drug-related deaths and transmission of blood-borne diseases.

Forensic Pathology Service: The Forensic Pathology Service provides professional services in forensic pathology and clinical forensic medicine services to Government departments. It is also responsible for the operation and management of public mortuaries.

MORE INFORMATION

Information on services provided by the Department can be obtained from the home page at <http://www.dh.gov.hk/>.