

A General Brief about the Department of Health

Mission

The Department of Health (DH) 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.

Organization

2. DH was established on 1st April 1989 upon the reorganization of the former Medical and Health Department. The Director of Health heads the Department and is assisted by two Deputy Directors.

3. DH has 7 200¹ staff, providing professional/specialized health care services/activities in 277 clinics/ centres in 105 locations. Some 1 200 staff who are currently deployed on the Government Out-patient Service will be transferred to the Hospital Authority in July 2003. The remaining 6 000 staff are mainly engaged in providing/supporting health care services focusing around the core themes of disease prevention and control; health advocacy and promotion; regulatory; and advisory. An organization chart depicting the services is at Annex I.

4. Insofar as disease prevention and control is concerned, efforts are concentrated in the Disease Prevention and Control Division, Regional Offices, the Public Health Laboratory Centre, the Port Health Office and the Central Health Education Unit. Together they employ some 900 staff, of which 340 are medical, nursing and laboratory professionals. It should be noted however that these offices also cover both communicable and non-communicable diseases as well as other public health functions, e.g. cervical cancer screening and microbiological examinations of water, food and diary products. A brief description of these services is provided in the ensuing paragraphs.

¹ All manpower figures quoted in this paper refer to strength in May 2003.

Disease Prevention and Control Division

5. The formulation of strategies and implementation of measures in the surveillance, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases is tasked with the Disease Prevention and Control Division (DPCD) set up in July 2000. In regard to communicable diseases, the DPCD conducts territory-wide surveillance on statutory notifiable and other infectious diseases of public health concern as provided under the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance, Cap 141 and its subsidiary Regulations (SARS was newly added to the list on 27 March 2003). Specifically, the Division operates a sentinel surveillance system through a network of 64 General Out-patient clinics and some 50 doctors from the private sector, and it conducts researches, identifies health problems and their determinants, develops and implements overall strategic plan for the effective and control of communicable diseases. It monitors and publishes data on infectious disease data and trends for health professionals and the public, and issues infectious disease alerts and advice for public health protection. Close liaison is maintained with the Hospital Authority, Government departments, professional experts, and health authorities locally and neighbouring areas in this connection.

Regional Offices

6. DH has four Regional Offices located in Hong Kong, Kowloon, New Territories East and New Territories West respectively, each shouldering administrative, public health and district health promotion functions in the region. Briefly on the administrative side, they are responsible for the overall management and coordination of health services in the region.

7. Main public health functions of the Regional Offices include surveillance, prevention and control of communicable diseases at the regional level and implementation of the school immunization programme. Investigation and control of heavy metal poisoning and herbal medicine poisoning are also within the sphere of the Regional Offices. The Regional Offices receive notifications from various sectors including clinicians of public and private hospitals, pathology laboratories, Government Out-patient Clinics and General Practitioners. Health Teams consisting of medical, nursing staff and health inspectors then carry out case investigation and control measures.etc. The Offices also give advice to institutions such as schools and elderly homes

in regard of communicable disease prevention and control.

Public Health Laboratory Centre

8. The Public Health Laboratory Centre provides quality laboratory services to Government clinics and health centers, as well as public hospitals and institutions for both public health functions and patient care. It comprises different laboratories specializing in bacteriology, virology, cytology, histopathology, immunology and neonatal screening. Laboratory support for the investigation and control of infectious diseases is mainly provided by the public health and virology laboratories. It maintains close liaison with the World Health Organisation and related organizations regularly on the surveillance of infectious diseases.

Port Health

9. DH's Port Health Office enforces the relevant provisions of the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance and the International Health Regulations at the seaport, airport and borders of Hong Kong to prevent the introduction of quarantinable diseases into (and export from) Hong Kong via air, land or sea. The Port Health Office operates a 24-hour health clearance service for incoming vessels, provides staff and resources in the airport to respond round-the-clock to public health emergencies, as well as provide travellers' health service at the Travel Health Centres.

Central Health Education Unit

10. The Central Health Education Unit is an advisory body on health education and a resource centre of health education materials. It aims to promote knowledge-based, needs-driven, effective and coordinated health promotion actions to increase people's knowledge and ability to use that knowledge for health gains.

Department of Health

3 June 2003