



For immediate release

HKSH launches EASE (Eating Allergens Safely & Early) Hong Kong's first food allergy prevention programme

(23 January 2018, Hong Kong) Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital has launched “**Eating Allergens Safely & Early (EASE) Programme**” in January 2018, in light of the increasing concerns of parents on food allergy. **EASE Programme** is Hong Kong's first food allergy prevention programme which helps parents to introduce allergenic foods to their high-risk infants for allergy at around 6 months of age to prevent future development of food allergy..

In 2012, children with food allergy around the world reached 4 million. About 5% of children in Hong Kong were affected by one or more types of food allergies. The prevalence and severity of food allergy have been on the increase, with eggs, milk and seafood as the most common allergens among local children.

Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital's Allergy Centre noted that many parents of children with food allergy tend to apply “delay tactics” in the introduction of allergenic foods. Such tactics include avoiding allergenic foods during pregnancy and lactation periods; delaying solid food introduction; sidestepping allergenic foods such as eggs and seafood until the infants blow the first birthday candle or even later. Despite efforts of delaying introduction of allergenic foods in children's diets, food allergy has no signs of tailing off.

Dr. Tak LEE, Director of Allergy Centre and Specialist in Immunology & Allergy, Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital said, “There is no evidence that avoiding solid food will help prevent food allergy. In fact, adopting an Avoidance Approach may significantly increase the risks of developing one.” **Dr. LEE** reminded parents to take heed of family history of allergic diseases. Children have higher risks of developing allergic diseases, including food allergy, if one (50% risk) or both (75% risk) parents have allergic diseases. It is therefore important for early intervention at infant stage in order to prevent food allergy from developing or worsening.

Dr. Alson CHAN, Specialist in Paediatric Immunology & Infectious Diseases of Allergy Centre, Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital added, “A number of latest major medical studies have shown that early introduction of allergenic foods is favourable to prevent food allergy among high-risk infants. The LEAP study in 2015 found that early introduction of peanuts, as early as by 4 months of age, reduced the prevalence of peanut allergy by 80%. The EAT study in 2016 further found that early introduction, before 6 months of age, of allergenic foods including cow's milk, peanut, eggs, sesame, fish and wheat, managed to reduce food allergy by three-fold within the first three years.”

Dr. CHAN further highlighted that the global guidelines have been updated since 2013 regarding the timeline of introducing solid food, including highly allergenic foods. It is recommended that this timeframe be advanced to around or before 6 months of age. In October 2017, APAPARI (Asia Pacific Association of Pediatric Allergy, Respiriology & Immunology) issued a consensus statement on early introduction of allergenic foods for the prevention of food allergy that allergenic foods should not be delayed, but introduced in a sensible manner once weaning has commenced.

“This is what we call a Gentle Training Approach, which aims to induce tolerance of allergenic foods through a gradual and timely exposure. Increase food diversity in the first year of life is



therefore highly encouraged to build up children's tolerance of a variety of foods," continued **Dr. CHAN**.

Ms. June CHAN, Senior Dietitian of Allergy Centre, Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital explained the key findings of a recent hospital survey on oral introduction of allergenic foods for infants, with about 430 respondents who are parents-to-be and parents of children under age 2. "About 50% participants and/or their spouse have allergic diseases. In other words, half of infants are considered to be in the high-risk group for allergy. More than 75% participants will start to introduce solid food in their infants' diet between 6 and 12 months, but another 5% will start their plan after 12 months," said **Ms. CHAN**.

Ms. CHAN pointed out that the delay is greater when introducing allergenic foods, such as eggs, milk, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish. About 30% will only include egg white, soy, wheat and fish in their infants' diets when they turn one-year-old. As much as 70% will only let their infants try tree nuts and shellfish after 12 months of age.

"Regardless of the family history of allergic diseases, over 90% of respondents said they would not introduce all above-mentioned allergenic foods within their infants' first year. Main concerns about solid introduction include children's refusal to eat solid food (37%), the fear of baby having food allergy (32%) and busy work schedule (13%)," added **Ms. CHAN**.

To ease parents' concerns on solid introduction and food allergy, **EASE Programme** is developed based on latest research findings and clinical experience. "It is a 3-year food allergy prevention programme for infants aged 3 to 12 months. Participating infants will receive skin prick tests and parents will be advised on introducing early solid and allergenic foods introduction, including milk, egg, peanut, fish and soy, in order to reduce the risk of developing food allergy in future," explained **Ms. CHAN**.

Dr. LEE hoped that the programme will help raise public awareness as the hospital survey showed that parents in Hong Kong may not be well informed of the latest development on solid food introduction for food allergy prevention. The ongoing practice to delay introduction of allergenic foods may possibly result in higher risks for food allergy for their infants.

"Parents are reminded that to avoid or delay eating allergenic foods cannot help food allergy prevention. Allergenic foods included in the programme should not be introduced later than 12 months," **Dr. LEE** added. "Breast feeding and early introduction of allergenic foods in infants can go together at the same time and they are both important in food allergy prevention. Parents are advised to consult their doctors and dietitians when considering introduction of allergenic foods to high-risk infants with a family history."

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HKSH Medical Group

Officially launched in September 2017, HKSH Medical Group, through its operating members, adopts a multi-faceted, coordinated approach to promote public health and advanced medicine through relentless efforts in clinical excellence, medical training and research as well as public health education.

Members of the HKSH Medical Group include Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, HKSH Healthcare and future affiliates. All members are dedicated to providing quality care to patients.

Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital

Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital is one of the leading private hospitals in Hong Kong. With the motto “Quality in Service Excellence in Care”, the Hospital is committed to serving the public as well as promoting medical education and research.

Allergy Centre

The Allergy Centre at Hong Kong Sanatorium Hospital was established in March 2012. It was the first time such a Centre had been created in a private and public hospital in Hong Kong. The Centre provides a patient-orientated, comprehensive, holistic and multi-professional clinical service of excellence. It educates the profession and allied health professionals about allergies. It engages the public and undertakes clinical research.

The Centre sees patients with any allergy or related problems

- Allergic conjunctivitis
- Allergic rhinitis
- Anaphylaxis
- Asthma
- Bronchopulmonary aspergillosis
- Drug allergy
- Eosinophilic disorders, including eosinophilic gastroenteritis / oesophagitis
- Food allergy
- Hives, eczema, angioedema
- Hypersensitivity pneumonitis
- Insect allergy
- Oral allergy syndrome

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Photo:

- 1) Launching Hong Kong's first food allergy prevention programme, **Eating Allergens Safely & Early (EASE) Programme**, allergy experts at Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital including Dr. Tak LEE (centre), Director of Allergy Centre and Specialist in Allergy and Immunology, Dr. Alson CHAN (left), Specialist in Paediatric Immunology & Infectious Diseases, and Ms. June CHAN (right), Senior Dietitian, Allergy Centre, Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, remind public that there should not be any delay in oral introduction of allergenic foods to high-risk infants of allergy and professional advice must be sought.



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