FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Ministry of Health’s “Communicable Diseases Surveillance in Singapore 2015” Annual Report.

In 2015, we continued to face communicable diseases threats from around the world. The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak in the Middle East continued, with a cumulative total of 1627 laboratory-confirmed cases, including 586 deaths, from 2012 to 2015. The risk of spread from a single imported case was highlighted when the Republic of Korea had a large outbreak, resulting in 186 cases, including 36 deaths, between May to July 2015. The outbreak of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone which started in 2014 resulted in 28,601 cases with 11,300 deaths (from 2014 to 3 January 2016). While the outbreak started to abate in early 2015, the three West African countries remain at high risk of additional small outbreaks. These incidents illustrated the importance of maintaining vigilance and being well prepared against different communicable diseases in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world.

On the home front, we experienced two unusual outbreaks of communicable diseases that tested our surveillance and response systems, namely invasive Group B Streptococcus (GBS) and acute Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) infections. In mid-2015, an uptrend of invasive GBS infections was reported. Investigations subsequently established a hitherto unknown association between the consumption of Chinese-style ready-to-eat raw fish dishes and Type III GBS disease, Sequence Type 283. This resulted in a ban on the sale of freshwater fish for raw consumption, which led to a decline in the number of cases. The other unusual outbreak in 2015 was the cluster of 22 acute HCV cases among patients in the renal ward of Singapore General Hospital between April and June 2015. The investigations into this outbreak revealed gaps in infection control practices. The outbreak prompted a review of the national surveillance systems, as well as our capability to respond to infectious disease outbreaks in both hospitals and the community.

The incidence of TB among residents and long staying non-residents continued to decline from 36.9 cases per 100,000 population in 2014 to 36.1 per 100,000 in 2015 under the Singapore TB Elimination Programme. To further strengthen case detection and treatment, Clinical Practice Guidelines for TB management were issued, with the aim of reinforcing the best practices for management of TB in Singapore. The number of newly reported HIV cases in 2015 (455) was similar to the number reported in 2014 (456). About 40% already had late-stage HIV infection at diagnosis. This is lower than the 49% recorded in 2014. Moving forward, MOH will be reviewing strategies to encourage early voluntary testing, to further drive down the proportion persons with late-stage infection at diagnosis.

This annual report provides comprehensive epidemiological information on communicable diseases that has been made possible through our close working relationship with the community of health professionals and our partner agencies. We thank all healthcare professionals and our partner agencies for their unwavering support and dedication in combating and minimising the threats of communicable diseases, for the common goal of safeguarding public health.

I hope that you will find this report useful. I look forward to your continued support and cooperation in the national surveillance of communicable diseases.

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