



香港兒科基金
Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation



20th Anniversary of the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation

Monday, 13th October, 2014

Press Release

Summit on Child Health and the Environment 2014

“Children are more vulnerable to environmental hazards.

Our children’s health is in danger with the unsettled toxicants in the environment.

Time to take action before it is too late! “

Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation wholly owned by the Hong Kong Paediatric Society is designated with the missions of public education and advocacy for child health in our community. At the time of 20th anniversary of the Foundation, we have jointly organized a multidisciplinary **“Summit on Child Health and the Environment”** at the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Jockey Club Building, Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen, 11-13 October 2014.

From the data published by WHO, 36% of all diseases among children aged 0 to 14 years is attributed to harmful exposures in the environment. **Globally, there is more than 5 million children die every year from diseases linked to the environment** while 60% of those deaths occur in children under 5 years old. Millions more have developmental problems caused by environmental hazards and statistics indicate a **rising trend of birth defects** especially in developing countries in recent years.

For the first time in Hong Kong, this conference on environmental health is specifically focused on children. In modern child health of the 21st Century, **Children’s Environmental Health is a new and expanding discipline** which studies the profound impact of chemical and environmental hazards on child health. **There is mounting evidence that children are highly sensitive to the negative impacts associated with environmental exposures particularly during their developmental phases.** This not only jeopardizes children’s health with disease and disability but also leads to long term sequelae across the life span. Children’s organs and tissues are more susceptible to chemical insults because of their rapid growth, high metabolic rate, immature immune system and receiving proportionally larger doses of environmental toxins than adults. The susceptibilities differ in different life stages from conception to adolescence due to dynamic growth and development processes as well as physiological and metabolic differences.

Summit on Child Health and the Environment 2014

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Prenatal environmental exposures of heavy metals such as lead, methylmercury and other neurotoxins are recognized causes of neurodevelopmental disorders in children. Even lower exposure level has clearly been shown to have clinical and subclinical effects. **Childhood lead exposure is estimated to contribute about 600,000 new cases of intellectual disabilities every year.** Air pollution and smoking exposure on respiratory diseases; the impact of food safety and eating habit on children's growth; water, light and noise pollutions on child health and health impacts with electronic media are well documented health risks leading to major morbidities and mortalities. **Environmentally-related childhood diseases have high social and economic costs.** Therefore, a mature and progressive society like Hong Kong **needs to timely address these emerging child health challenges.**

The Birth Cohort session in the Summit has invited regional experts in Asia-Pacific area from Mainland China, Japan, Taiwan as well as Hong Kong to highlight their research findings on the causal relationship of environmental factors towards various health outcomes. **The Hong Kong 1997 cohort is one of the largest Chinese birth cohorts in the world** with data showing how environmental exposures related to the growth and development in the first 1000 days of life which is the most vulnerable period in rapid developing brains.

Under the guidance of **Professor Ruth Etzel, our international advisor from International Pediatric Association (IPA)**, we have brought together in this Summit world and local paediatric and child health experts, public health advocates, local environmental health initiatives, policy-makers as well as other related professionals, to share scientific evidence of the impacts of the environment on our children's health, the burden of diseases in existing situation, the strategies of action plans from international and local experience, and most importantly the possible solution and policy to reduce the environmental hazards and to save the life of many susceptible children.

At the end of the conference, a **Round-Table Discussion gathering all the stakeholders and experts shared and formulated a strategic action plan to address the pressing environmental health issues**, to identify key stakeholders, to assess resource implications, to consolidate outcome measures and to guide future research direction and government policy to achieve our goals for environmental health.

Children represent 20% of our population but 100% of our future. It is the prime duty of every adult and healthcare professional to ensure a healthy environment for our children to grow and to develop. It is time to take action to protect the health of our children today and the adults in future before it is too late. Let's take this opportunity to work together in solidarity to mobilize professional, social,

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ecological and government commitment so as to fulfill our objective of “Healthy Environment for Healthy Children”.

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