

# Aberdeen seafood 'caused' epidemic

By Lily Mak and Bonnie Chiu

TWELVE of the 22 cholera cases identified so far can be traced back to contaminated seafood in Aberdeen, according to the Director of Health.

Dr Margaret Chan for the first time provided a detailed case breakdown in yesterday's Legco Health Services Panel meeting.

Of the 22 cases, three contracted cholera overseas — two in mainland China and one in Thailand. Of the remaining 19, 12 could be traced to contaminated seafood sold in Aberdeen.

"The use of 'fingerprint' testing has confirmed that the cholera viruses for all of these patients were of the identical species," Dr Chan said. She told legislators a majority of the patients had eaten contaminated shrimps and crabs.

The other seven cases were classified as "sporadic cases" whose history of eating seafood was unclear. Some had not eaten seafood at all, while others had eaten food such as contaminated vegetables.

"All the 22 cases identified belonged to cholera 'El Tor', which can be cured. Hong Kong is no longer a Third World country and we have enough resources to treat people," Dr Chan said.

The El Tor strain was named after the massive Red

Sea outbreak in 1929 in which it was first identified, which claimed thousands of victims.

In yesterday's Southern District Board meeting, representatives from the Department of Health, the Marine Department and the Urban Services Department said they had tried their best to prevent and control the spread of cholera, but some district boards still said they were dissatisfied with what the government had done before and after this outbreak.

Board member Miu Wah-chang said the government had known for a long time the water quality in Aberdeen typhoon shelter was bad, but did nothing to improve it.

"After the outbreak of cholera, many government departments reacted slowly," board member Joseph Chan Yueksut said.

The government should immediately ban the use of polluted sea water to keep fish, he said.

"If there is no such legislation, why don't they ban the use of polluted sea water by issuing an urgent order?"

The Marine Department's southern marine officer, Yong Bing-shung, said more and more warning notice boards would be placed near typhoon shelters to warn people not to use illegally placed storage nets to keep fish.