

CHP notified of human case of avian influenza A(H5N6) in Beijing

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (August 19) received notification of an additional human case of avian influenza A(H5N6) in Beijing from the National Health Commission, and again urged the public to maintain strict personal, food and environmental hygiene both locally and during travel.

The case involved a 59-year-old female from Beijing. She was hospitalised on August 11. She is now in a critical condition.

From 2014 to date, 24 human cases of avian influenza A(H5N6) have been reported by the Mainland health authorities.

"All novel influenza A infections, including H5N6, are notifiable infectious diseases in Hong Kong," the spokesman said.

Travellers to the Mainland or other affected areas must avoid visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms. They should be alert to the presence of backyard poultry when visiting relatives and friends. They should also avoid purchasing live or freshly slaughtered poultry, and avoid touching poultry/birds or their droppings. They should strictly observe personal and hand hygiene when visiting any place with live poultry.

Travellers returning from affected areas should consult a doctor promptly if symptoms develop, and inform the doctor of their travel history for prompt diagnosis and treatment of potential diseases. It is essential to tell the doctor if they have seen any live poultry during travel, which may imply possible exposure to contaminated environments. This will enable the doctor to assess the possibility of avian influenza and arrange necessary investigations and appropriate treatment in a timely manner.

While local surveillance, prevention and control measures are in place, the CHP will remain vigilant and work closely with the World Health Organization and relevant health authorities to monitor the latest developments.

The CHP's Port Health Office conducts health surveillance measures at all boundary control points. Thermal imaging systems are in place for body temperature checks on inbound travellers. Suspected cases will be immediately referred to public hospitals for follow-up.

The display of posters and broadcasting of health messages in departure and arrival halls as health education for travellers is under way. The travel industry and other stakeholders are regularly updated on the latest information.

The public should maintain strict personal, hand, food and environmental hygiene and take heed of the advice below if handling poultry:

- Avoid touching poultry, birds, animals or their droppings;
- When buying live chickens, do not touch them and their droppings. Do not blow at their bottoms. Wash eggs with detergent if soiled with faecal matter and cook and consume the eggs immediately. Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling chickens and eggs;
- Eggs should be cooked well until the white and yolk become firm. Do not eat raw eggs or dip cooked food into any sauce with raw eggs. Poultry should be cooked thoroughly. If there is pinkish juice running from the cooked poultry or the middle part of its bone is still red, the poultry should be cooked again until fully done;
- Wash hands frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, before handling food or eating, and after going to the toilet, touching public installations or equipment such as escalator handrails, elevator control panels or door knobs, or when hands are dirtied by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing; and
- Wear a mask if fever or respiratory symptoms develop, when going to a hospital or clinic, or while taking care of patients with fever or respiratory symptoms.

The public may visit the CHP's pages for more information: the [avian influenza](#) page, the weekly [Avian Influenza Report](#), [global statistics and affected areas](#) of avian influenza, the [Facebook Page](#) and the [YouTube Channel](#).

Composite Interest Rate: End of July 2019

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) announced today (Monday) the composite interest rate at the end of July 2019. (Note 1)

The composite interest rate, which is a measure of the average cost of funds of banks, decreased by 1 basis point to 0.94 per cent at the end of July 2019, from 0.95 per cent at the end of June 2019 (see Chart 1 in the Annex). The decrease in composite interest rate reflected decreases in the weighted funding cost for both deposits and interbank funds during the month (see Chart 2 in the Annex). (Note 2)

The historical data of the composite interest rate from the end of the

fourth quarter of 2003 to the end of July 2019 are available in the Monthly Statistical Bulletin on the HKMA website (www.hkma.gov.hk). The next data release is scheduled for 19 September 2019 and will provide the composite interest rate at the end of August 2019.

Note 1: The composite interest rate is a weighted average interest rate of all Hong Kong dollar interest-rate-sensitive liabilities, which include deposits from customers, amounts due to banks, negotiable certificates of deposit and other debt instruments, and all other liabilities that do not involve any formal payment of interest but the values of which are sensitive to interest rate movements (such as Hong Kong dollar non-interest bearing demand deposits) on the books of banks. Data from retail banks, which account for about 90 per cent of the total customers' deposits in the banking sector, are used in the calculation. It should be noted that the composite interest rate represents only average interest expenses. There are various other costs involved in the making of a loan, such as operating costs (e.g. staff and rental expenses), credit cost and hedging cost, which are not covered by the composite interest rate.

Note 2: Since June 2019, the composite interest rate and weighted deposit rate have been calculated based on the new local "Interest rate risk in the banking book" (IRRBB) framework. As such, these figures are not strictly comparable with those of previous months.

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for May – July 2019

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for May – July 2019) released today (August 19) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 2.8% in April – June 2019 to 2.9% in May – July 2019. The underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.0% in the two periods.

Comparing May – July 2019 with April – June 2019, movements in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) in different industry sectors varied, with a relatively notable increase observed in the food and beverage service activities sector. Movements in the underemployment rate in different industry sectors also varied, but were generally small in magnitude.

Total employment decreased by around 3 300 from 3 870 700 in April – June 2019 to 3 867 400 in May – July 2019. The labour force in May – July 2019 was 3 985 900, about the same as that in April – June 2019 (3 985 000).

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) increased by around 4 200 from 114 300 in April – June 2019 to 118 500 in May – July 2019. The number of underemployed persons in May – July 2019 was 40 700,

about the same as that in April – June 2019 (41 200).

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "After remaining unchanged for over a year, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate edged up by 0.1 percentage point to a still-low level of 2.9%. Meanwhile, the underemployment rate held steady at 1.0%."

"The manpower situation in most sectors remained largely stable. Yet, as the consumption market stayed soft, the unemployment rate of the retail, accommodation and food services sectors taken together went up from the preceding three-month period. Also, the import and export trade sector has been facing increasing pressure amid shrinking trade flows, with the unemployment rate generally on the rise since early this year."

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "As the economy is expected to stay weak in the coming months, the local labour market will unavoidably be subject to greater pressure. The Government will monitor the labour market situation closely."

He noted that the Labour Department (LD) continues to promote employment at all fronts. Under the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, employers engaging job seekers aged 60 or above who are unemployed or have left the workforce are offered an on-the-job training allowance up to \$4,000 per month per employee for a period of six to 12 months. For employers engaging unemployed persons aged 40 to 59, the maximum amount of on-the-job training allowance is \$3,000 per month per employee for a period of three to six months.

On large-scale job fairs, the LD will organise the Job Fair for Middle-aged and Elderly Employment on October 3 and 4 at the Lok Fu Place, and the New Opportunities-New Terrain Job Expo on October 29 and 30 at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In addition, industry-based or district-based job fairs are regularly organised at the LD's industry-based recruitment centres and job centres located across the territory.

Further information

The unemployment and underemployment statistics were compiled from the findings of the continuous General Household Survey.

The survey for May – July 2019 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 74 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong.

Data on labour force characteristics were obtained from the survey by interviewing each member aged 15 or over in the sampled households.

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour

Organization.

Detailed analysis of labour force characteristics is given in the "Quarterly Report on General Household Survey" which is published four times a year. The latest issue of the publication contains statistics for the quarter January – March 2019 while the next issue covering the quarter April – June 2019 will be available by end-August 2019. Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=B1050001).

For enquiries about labour force statistics, please contact the Household Statistics Analysis Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5508 or email: ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Monday, August 19, 2019 is 106.5 (up 0.1 against last Saturday's index).

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, August 17, 2019 was 106.4 (down 0.1 against last Friday's index).

Preliminary report on Hong Kong Airlines cabin crew injury during turbulence encounter released

The Air Accident Investigation Authority (AAIA) today (August 19) released Accident Investigation Preliminary Report 5/2019 on an accident in which a cabin crew member sustained an injury on board an A330-243 aircraft (registration mark B-LHA) operated by Hong Kong Airlines Limited during a turbulence encounter enroute from Beijing to Hong Kong on June 18, 2019.

A spokesperson for the AAIA said that the preliminary report contains information relating to the accident collected up to the time of issue, and must be regarded as tentative.

"The AAIA will continue to collect and study all relevant information in order to determine the circumstances and causes of the accident. Further in-depth investigation and analysis have to be conducted before any conclusion can be drawn," the spokesperson said.

The full Accident Investigation Preliminary Report 5/2019 is available for download from the AAIA webpage (www.thb.gov.hk/aaia/eng/investigation_reports/index.htm).