

# Relief and enhancement measures under Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme

The Department of Health (DH) today (June 5) announced that, as a relief measure in the 2019-20 Budget, an additional \$1,000 worth of Elderly Health Care Vouchers will be provided, on a one-off basis, to each eligible elderly person with effect from June 26. The accumulation limit of the vouchers will also be increased to \$8,000 on the same day. It is estimated that the above measures will benefit about 1.3 million elderly people.

The following enhancement measures will also take effect on June 26:

- (a) setting a cap of \$2,000 every two years on the voucher amount that can be spent on optometry services;
- (b) improving the enquiry system for checking voucher balances; and
- (c) regularising the Pilot Scheme at the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH).

"In January 2019, the annual voucher amount of \$2,000 was released to all eHealth (Subsidies) accounts of elderly people aged 65 or above. With the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2019, an additional one-off \$1,000 worth of vouchers will be deposited into their accounts on June 26," a spokesman for the DH said.

The spokesman added, "In view of the outcome of a review on the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, the DH will also implement several enhancement measures with effect from June 26 to enable eligible elderly people to make better use of their vouchers.

"The accumulation limit of the vouchers will also be raised from \$5,000 to \$8,000 as a regular measure. Persons aged 65 or above in 2019 (i.e. those born in 1954 or before) who have yet to create an eHealth (Subsidies) account on June 26 will receive their entitled voucher amount on the day they create an account, including the additional \$1,000, subject to the accumulation limit of \$8,000.

"Furthermore, a cap of \$2,000 every two years on the voucher amount that can be spent on optometry services will be introduced to encourage elderly people to use the vouchers on different primary healthcare services. For elderly people who are eligible to use vouchers in 2019 (i.e. those born in 1954 or before), the first cycle will run from June 26, 2019, to December 31, 2020 (i.e. the capping amount is still \$2,000 despite the first cycle being less than two years), while the second cycle will run from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022, and so on. For elderly people born in 1955 or after, the relevant cycle will start to count from January 1 of the year in which they become eligible to use vouchers.

"Elderly people can currently check their voucher balances via the

Scheme's website and Interactive Voice Response System (2838 0511). The services will be improved from June 26 to allow elderly people to also check the amount of vouchers to be disbursed to their accounts on January 1 of the coming year, and the amount of vouchers expected to be forfeited on that day due to the accumulation limit being exceeded. We expect that the new measure can help elderly people more effectively manage and plan for the use of their vouchers.

"To safeguard the rights of elderly people, we suggest that voucher users learn about the service fees and check their voucher balance before using the vouchers to avoid being charged by service providers at a higher rate than non-voucher users.

"In addition, the Government will regularise the Pilot Scheme at HKU-SZH launched in 2015, allowing eligible elderly people to continue to use the vouchers to pay for outpatient services provided by designated departments at HKU-SZH. This will enable Hong Kong elderly people who reside in places near Shenzhen to use primary healthcare services in Shenzhen."

The Scheme aims to subsidise eligible elderly people to use private primary healthcare services. Vouchers are issued and used through an electronic platform. Elderly people do not need to pre-register, collect or carry the vouchers. Elderly people who intend to use the vouchers only need to show to the participating service providers their valid Hong Kong identity card or Certificate of Exemption issued by the Immigration Department, and sign a consent form confirming the voucher amount to be used after receiving healthcare services in person. For elderly people who do not have an eHealth (Subsidies) account, the service providers will create an account for them on the same occasion free of charge.

The DH will later issue letters to notify participating service providers of the details of the above measures, and publicise them to members of the public through different channels. Members of the public may also visit the Scheme's website ([www.hcv.gov.hk](http://www.hcv.gov.hk)) or call the enquiry hotline (2838 2311) for relevant information.

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## **Hong Kong Customs combats illegal import of pharmaceutical products**

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (June 4) arrested two directors of a medical diagnostic group suspected of illegally importing pharmaceutical products, in contravention of the Import and Export Ordinance (IEO).

Customs earlier conducted a joint operation with the relevant department and raided two premises of the medical diagnostic group located in Yau Ma Tei

and Kwun Tong. After investigation, Customs officers yesterday arrested a 61-year-old man and a 44-year-old woman.

Investigation is ongoing and the arrested persons have been released on bail pending further investigation.

Under the IE0, import and export of pharmaceutical products not under and in accordance with a licence is an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected violations of the IE0 to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account ([crimereport@customs.gov.hk](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)).

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## LCQ10: Policy on private recreational leases

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

The Government conducted a six-month public consultation on the policy on private recreational leases last year, and published the outcome of the consultation in February this year. It was recommended in the consultation paper that the leases currently held respectively by community organisations and private sports clubs be handled separately. For the 39 sites currently granted to community organisations, it was proposed to switch to the handling of them by way of special purpose leases. For the 27 sites granted to private sports clubs, it was proposed that they continue to be handled according to the current arrangements, but the Government would charge the sports clubs, upon renewal of their leases, a land premium of one-third of the full market value (FMV), and require them to open up their facilities further. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific method to be adopted by the Lands Department for calculating the FMV land premiums of the sites currently granted to private sports clubs;

(2) given that the Government proposed in the consultation paper a transitional instalment option for land premium payment by private sports clubs upon renewal of their leases (i.e. 20 per cent of the land premium to be payable immediately upon renewal of leases and the remainder to be paid by five annual instalments, subject to payment of an interest at a fixed rate of 2 per cent per annum above the average best lending rate), whether the

Government has decided to adopt this arrangement; if not, of the alternative arrangements;

(3) in respect of each of the 27 sites granted to private sports clubs, of (i) the total number of hours for which sports and recreation facilities thereat were opened to eligible outside bodies, as well as (ii) the average monthly total hours of sports programmes (which were co-organised with sports organisations and were opened for participation by the public) held thereat, last year (set out in the table below); and

	Name of private sports club	(i)	(ii)
1.	Aberdeen Boat Club		
.....	.....		
27.	Yau Yat Chuen Garden City Club		

(4) as individual private sports clubs have indicated that due to space constraints, they are unable to adjust their positioning and membership policy so that they may be treated as community organisations, and they even need to raise funds by drastically increasing membership fees in order to meet the expenditure on land premiums, which may make them become sports clubs exclusive to only a small number of rich people, whether the Government has assessed if such a situation will arise and what concrete solutions are in place?

Reply:

President,

The Governemnt completed the review on the policy on Private Recreational Leases (PRLs) and published the outcome of the public consultation in February 2019. Submissions received during the public consultation are in general supportive to the following recommendations of the policy review:

(a) handling the leases held by "community organisations" and "private sports clubs" differently and granting new special purpose leases (instead of PRLs) to sports and recreational sites held by "community organisations";

(b) continuing to handle the sites held by private sports clubs under the PRL policy but the lease conditions must be significantly modified to better meet the dual needs of supporting sports development and optimising land use;

(c) taking into account the contribution of private sports clubs in promoting sports development in Hong Kong when considering renewal of their leases upon expiry;

(d) charging private sports clubs suitable for lease renewal one-third of the full market value (FMV) land premium;

(e) requiring private sports clubs to open up 30 per cent of the total sports capacity of their sports and recreational facilities to eligible outside bodies and partner with sports organisations to organise sports programmes that are open for enrolment by individual members of the public with a minimum sports programme hours of 240 per month;

(f) drawing up a list of allowable sports supporting facilities and ancillary facilities for PRLs;

(g) enhancing the monitoring of PRLs and corporate governance of the lessees; and

(h) defining the principles in approving applications for new sites for sports and recreational use.

The Government will handle the leases which have expired or will soon expire according to these recommendations. The reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In estimating the FMV land premium of PRL sites, the Lands Department will in general base on the value of a site without any building taking into account the land usage and terms and conditions of the land grant or lease renewal (e.g. not allowing non-members' use of food and beverage facilities and the need to open up sports and recreation facilities to eligible outside bodies). The Government will follow up with private sports clubs on details of the principles for estimating land premium.

(2) To allow more time for private sports clubs to plan and prepare for payment of land premium, the Government proposed in the policy review that a transitional instalment option will be made available to those suitable for lease renewal with their leases expiring between 2026 and 2027 (Note). Under this option, a private sports club has to pay 20 per cent of the land premium upfront upon lease renewal, and settle the rest of the land premium by five annual instalments (payable in arrears) subject to payment of interest at a fixed rate of 2 per cent per annum above the average best lending rate of the three note-issuing banks. In view of the concerns over the arrangement of land premium payment expressed during the public consultation, the Government will explore the feasibility of modifying the prevailing instalment option.

(3) The total number of hours of sports and recreational facilities opened up by private sports clubs to eligible outside bodies in 2018 are at Annex. Besides, it is a new policy that private sports clubs are required to partner with sports organisations to organise sports programmes open for public enrolment. To take forward the policy, the Government will include relevant lease conditions upon renewal of leases with private sports clubs in future and require the clubs to report the details of such sports programmes organised in the quarterly reports. We do not possess information on the sports programmes co-organised last year by private sports clubs and sports

organisations for public enrolment.

(4) The Government expects private sports clubs to make greater and more comprehensive contribution to sports development in Hong Kong, which include opening up their sports and recreational facilities for use by non-members. For private sports clubs which cannot afford or do not wish to pay concessionary land premium but still wish to continue operation, they may consider switching to a "quasi-public" operation mode (e.g. adopting an open membership policy, providing sports and recreational facilities for use by members of the public at a low fee). If the Government is satisfied that the private sports club concerned is operating in a "quasi-public" nature, consideration may be given to the adoption of the lease arrangements applicable for "community organisations" upon expiry of the current lease of the club and granting it a special purpose lease with nominal land premium subject to the approval of the Chief Executive in Council. If any private sports club wishes to seek renewal upon expiry of the current lease, it has to prove its contribution towards sports development of Hong Kong. It has to meet the requirement of further opening up of its facilities for public use apart from paying the concessionary land premium.

Note: Including 20 PRLs which were granted renewal for 15 years up to 2026 to 2027 in 2011 to 2012. As for the six PRLs expiring between 2014 and 2024, if they are considered suitable for lease renewal, the Government will renew their PRLs up to June 30, 2027 on nominal premium. The instalment option is not applicable to the remaining one PRL which will expire in 2056.

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## **LCQ4: Rodent infestation and human infection of rat Hepatitis E**

Following is a question by the Hon Ho Kai-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

The Rodent Infestation Rate (RIR) of the Wong Tai Sin (WTS) district for the whole of last year stood at 1 per cent, which was the second lowest among 19 districts in Hong Kong. However, quite a number of residents in that district have pointed out that rodent infestation in the district is serious, with rats frequently spotted in markets and public housing estates. Furthermore, the world's first two cases of human infection of rat Hepatitis E were found in Hong Kong last year, whose patients were both residing in the WTS district. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that when the RIR of a district reaches 10 per cent or higher, the

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will step up rodent disinfestation work in the district, and when the district's RIR reaches 20 per cent or higher, the relevant government departments will form a joint task force and launch a special rodent control operation, of the criteria adopted by FEHD for setting such levels for triggering strengthened rodent disinfestation work;

(2) as FEHD has admitted that RIRs cannot fully reflect the actual situations of rodent infestation in individual districts, whether FEHD will review RIR, and work with scientific research institutions to devise a new index with a higher reference value; if FEHD will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that a total of five cases of human infection of rat Hepatitis E have so far been recorded in Hong Kong, how the Department of Health ascertains that there is no unreported case in the community, and what measures are in place to stop the disease from spreading and becoming an endemic disease?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) At present, there is no internationally adopted rodent infestation index. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has devised the Rodent Infestation Rate (RIR) and the corresponding actions at different levels with reference to overseas practices and the actual situation and experience of Hong Kong.

The RIR is divided into three levels. Level 1 (below 10 per cent) indicates that rodent infestation is not extensive during the survey period. FEHD staff will carry out routine rodent prevention and control work and conduct targeted anti-rodent operations at locations where rodent activities are detected. Level 2 (10 per cent to below 20 per cent) indicates that rodent infestation is slightly extensive during the survey period. FEHD's anti-rodent operations will cover the activity areas of an entire rodent population. Level 3 (20 per cent or above) indicates that rodent infestation is extensive during the survey period and rodent colonies may have been formed. FEHD will set up an inter-departmental working group to be chaired by a District Environmental Hygiene Superintendent to co-ordinate anti-rodent operations at district level, including strengthening cleansing services, assisting other departments in carrying out anti-rodent work in areas under their purview and promoting rodent prevention and control in the community.

(2) The RIR assesses the distribution of rodent infestation in public places within the survey areas. It is used to reflect the extensiveness of rodent infestation but not the rodent problem in a whole district. The main purpose of conducting the RIR survey is to identify problematic areas which require allocation of targeted resources for carrying out anti-rodent operations.

In formulating rodent prevention and control work, FEHD will take into account, in addition to the RIR, factors such as the complaint figures and reports, views of the local community and trails left by rodents found during inspections, in order to have a comprehensive assessment of the rodent problem in the district concerned and devise targeted anti-rodent operations at problematic areas.

To increase the sensitivity of the surveys for a more accurate assessment of rodent problem, FEHD is conducting tests on different rodent baits to identify the most suitable one for the latest situation in Hong Kong. In addition, FEHD will annually review the locations and coverage of baiting points in all districts. The number of survey areas will be increased from 41 (around 2 300 baiting points) to 50 (around 2 650 baiting points) this year.

Apart from the RIR survey, FEHD is exploring other methods to monitor rodent infestation, including the use of night vision and thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence to detect and analyse the presence of rodents. Besides, FEHD will regularly review the latest measures adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other cities for rodent surveillance, and work out suitable measures for Hong Kong having regard to our actual situation. FEHD is inviting WHO experts to visit Hong Kong and give us advice in this respect, while exploring the possibilities of inviting other overseas experts to Hong Kong.

(3) A total of five cases of human infection of rat Hepatitis E virus (HEV) have been recorded by the Department of Health (DH) since 2018. The DH's epidemiological investigations have yet to determine the source and the route of infection. There is also no scientific evidence of direct human-to-human transmission of rat HEV at the moment. Since November 2018, the DH has enhanced the surveillance of HEV by conducting further testing on rat HEV in the samples collected from HEV patients, in addition to regular testing on human HEV types. The DH will continue to enhance its surveillance of HEV, including conducting testing on human and rat HEVs in clinical specimens. The DH will also conduct further analysis on samples collected from patients with rat HEV infection, in collaboration with the Department of Microbiology of the University of Hong Kong. Furthermore, the DH issued a letter to all local doctors and hospitals on May 17 to inform them of relevant situation and preventive measures and remind them to pay special attention to immunocompromised persons with liver function derangement. The DH will continue to closely monitor the situation in Hong Kong.

The Government has attached great importance to anti-rodent work. In view of the recent cases of human infection of rat HEV, the Government has launched a territory-wide cleaning campaign on May 20, targeting areas such as rear lanes, housing estates, food premises and public markets. Cleaning work and enhanced enforcement actions have been carried out and public education and publicity in this regard have also been strengthened. All departments will remain vigilant and work together for effective rodent prevention and control. For instance, the Highways Department has stepped up



its inspection work at rear lanes with serious rodent problems in all districts, carried out instant repairs to damaged road surface or nullahs, improved road conditions and filled rat holes. The Housing Department has also been examining whether the rodent-proof devices installed in over 180 public housing estates function well, and will repair, reinforce or add devices at once if needed to eliminate rodents and their harbourage points. FEHD will enhance street cleaning, carry out publicity and public education work on rodent prevention and control, and step up enforcement actions against illegal dumping of waste by food premises. All District Offices of the Home Affairs Department and FEHD will also strengthen liaison with property management companies, District Councils (DCs) and local communities in order to raise public awareness of the importance of maintaining personal and environmental hygiene in preventing rodent infestation in private places, including people's homes and housing estates, through carrying out publicity at the district level.

Apart from government efforts, the collaboration between the public and private sectors (food premises in particular) to eliminate the conditions for rodents to survive at source is of paramount importance to effective prevention of rodent infestation. The Government will consolidate the experience it has gained from this three-month territory-wide cleaning campaign, continue with its on-going rodent prevention and control work, and strengthen its collaboration with various DCs.

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## Lifesaving services at Cafeteria New Beach resume

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at regular intervals:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department has announced that the lifesaving services at Cafeteria New Beach in Tuen Mun District resumed today (June 5). The lifesaving services at the beach were suspended earlier due to an insufficient number of lifeguards on duty.