

## LCQ4: Tobacco control and combating trading activities of duty-not-paid cigarettes

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

At present, the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health is mainly responsible for matters relating to tobacco control and taking enforcement action under the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371). From time to time, TACO conducts plainclothes inspections or test purchases, and conducts investigations in the form of joint operations with other law enforcement departments, while the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) combats smuggling and trading activities of illicit cigarettes on different fronts. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of inspections conducted and fixed penalty notices issued by TACO in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown by smoking offences;
- (2) of the respective establishment and strength of frontline law enforcement officers of different ranks in TACO in each of the past three years;
- (3) of the details and results of C&ED's efforts to combat smuggling and trading activities of illicit cigarettes in the past three years;
- (4) on import cases, of the following information in each of the past three years: the number of referrals received by TACO from C&ED and the number of summonses issued, the number of cases convicted in the court, and other details of the relevant cases;
- (5) on in-town enforcement, of the number and results of various investigation actions (including plainclothes inspections, test purchases, and joint operations) conducted by TACO in each of the past three years; and
- (6) how the authorities plan to enhance interdepartmental collaboration in the future to combat the sale of duty-not-paid cigarettes and alternative smoking products?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Department of Health (DH) and the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), the consolidated reply to the various parts of the

Hon Lai Tung-kwok's question is as follows:

The Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the DH is the principal enforcement agency for the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) and the Fixed Penalty (Smoking Offences) Ordinance (Cap. 600) (with the number of full-time enforcement staff in the approved establishment provided at Annex I). The TACO mainly enforces (i) offences relating to illegal smoking in statutory no-smoking area (including aiding and abetting smoking offences and obstruction of inspectors' duties); (ii) offences relating to tobacco advertisement and sale; and (iii) offences relating to alternative smoking products (ASPs). The C&ED is the principal enforcement agency responsible for the suppression of smuggling activities, including collecting and protecting revenue from dutiable commodities stipulated in the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109). At present, combating illicit cigarettes is mainly the responsibility of the C&ED. The numbers of inspections conducted, fixed penalty notices (FPNs)/summons issued by the TACO between 2022 and 2024 for smoking and other related offences are at Annex II.

As regards illegal smoking offences, under the prevailing legislation, any person who commits the act of smoking in a designated no smoking area is liable to a fixed penalty of \$1,500. To effectively mitigate the impact of secondhand smoking on the public and enhance the deterrent effect against illegal smoking, the TACO has flexibly deployed resources and adopted new enforcement strategies since 2023, which included extending the time of surveillance and inspections in no smoking areas, deploying plain-clothes officers to take proactive enforcement actions, and would issue FPNs to smoking offenders without warning.

The number of prosecutions against illegal smoking has surged due to the aforementioned new enforcement strategies. The number of FPNs issued increased from 6 296 in 2022 to 10 261 in 2023 and 13 488 in 2024. Besides, to step up efforts in targeting venues (e.g. bars and restaurants) that offer waterpipe tobacco to customers, the TACO, on its own and in conjunction with the Police, has taken over 400 enforcement actions in the past three years. In addition to prosecution against illegal smoking, the TACO has also initiated prosecutions against persons suspected of inciting, aiding and abetting smoking offenders (including bar operators who have committed aiding and abetting smoking offences).

As regards smoking product advertisements, under the prevailing legislation, no person shall display or distribute smoking product advertisements (including leaflets) or place smoking product advertisements on the Internet. Offenders are liable to a fine of \$50,000. The TACO has been actively conducting market surveillance, and in order to further curb the situation of illicit cigarette leaflets, the TACO has been strengthening joint operations since 2023, including joint operations with the Police, the Housing Department (HD) and the C&ED against complaints of distributing illicit cigarette leaflets. A total of over 250 joint operations were conducted in the past three years. Since 2021, the TACO has successfully prosecuted 17 offenders for distributing smoking product leaflets. The highest penalty for these convicted cases was a fine of \$8,000. For online advertisement, apart from conducting investigations and prosecutions upon

receipt of complaints or referrals, the TACO also actively carries out online surveillance. Upon identification of smoking product advertisements, the TACO will ask the relevant internet service providers and social media platforms to remove such contents as soon as possible. The TACO has removed over 3 200 webpages and social media accounts or posts involving smoking product advertisements in aggregate in the past three years.

As regards the ASP ban, with effect from April 30, 2022, no person may import, promote, manufacture, sell, or possess for commercial purposes ASPs, in accordance with the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) and the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60). The C&ED is responsible for intercepting illegally-imported ASPs at import level with intercepted cases referred to the TACO for follow-up and prosecution, the TACO is also responsible for market surveillance and instituting prosecution.

For cases involving import of ASPs, as at December 31, 2024, the TACO issued 1 272 summonses to offenders of importing cases, of which offenders in 694 cases were convicted by court and were fined \$300 to \$42,000. During the same period, the C&ED detected 52 cases involving offences under the C&ED's enforcement and illegal import of ASPs concurrently, of which 26 were convicted and the highest fine and sentence imposed were \$5,000 and four months' imprisonment respectively. Besides, the TACO also monitors the sale of ASP on the Internet, and conducts test buy for follow-up investigation, as well as liaises with relevant organisation to assist in removing the illegal online content. For cases of suspected sale or possession for commercial purposes of ASPs, the TACO issued 24 summonses to offenders, of which 20 cases were convicted by court and sentenced to two months' imprisonment at most.

The relevant ban on ASPs has been in force for nearly three years. At present, there are no legal channels to import or purchase ASPs, and ASPs purchased for personal use before the ban came into effect should have been largely consumed after a certain period of time. Prevailing legislation does not prohibit the possession of ASPs for non-commercial use. To suppress the continued circulation of ASPs, which are hazardous novel tobacco products, in Hong Kong and to tackle the problem of using e-cigarette devices to abuse drugs at its root, the Health Bureau will further strengthen the regulation of ASPs, including banning the possession of relevant products. Details will be announced later.

On the other hand, as an important pillar under the tobacco control strategy, the Government will spare no efforts in combating illicit cigarettes. At present, combating illicit cigarettes is mainly the responsibility of the C&ED. The C&ED will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach and take stringent enforcement actions at all levels to combat the sale of illicit cigarettes. The C&ED exchanges intelligence with the Police from time to time and conducts joint operations in a timely manner, including combating cases of cigarette smuggling and illicit cigarette storage in downtown. In addition, the C&ED has been maintaining close intelligence exchange and co-operation with the Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies to combat cross-boundary cigarette smuggling activities.

The enforcement figures against illicit cigarettes (including smuggling, storage and distribution as well as sale) in the past three years are set out at Annex III. The increase in the number of seizures of illicit cigarettes reflects the effectiveness of the C&ED's stepped-up actions against illicit cigarettes and the success of its enforcement strategy does not denote an expanding scale of illicit cigarettes activities. The Government announced the "10 measures for tobacco control" in June last year. Stepping up actions against illicit cigarettes was accorded the highest priority among the 10 measures, including:

- (i) introducing a duty stamp system to distinguish duty-paid cigarettes from non-duty-paid cigarettes;
- (ii) requiring tobacco products being sold at a price lower than the tobacco duty need to be proved duty-paid;
- (iii) increasing the maximum penalty for handling, possessing, selling or buying duty-not-paid cigarettes; and
- (iv) listing the relevant offences under the Schedule of the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (OSCO) (Cap. 455), so as to enable the C&ED to freeze and confiscate illicit proceeds and assets associated with illicit cigarette activities by virtue of the OSCO.

On duty stamp system, taking into account factors such as enforcement effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, the Government proposes to require the affixing of duty-paid labels on the retail packages of cigarettes at this stage. Through the application of anti-forgery features and related digital technologies, frontline officers of the C&ED would be able to distinguish duty-paid cigarettes from duty-not-paid ones in a more effective manner, thereby enhancing enforcement efficiency. The C&ED expects that a pilot scheme on the duty stamp system will be rolled out in the middle of this year to work out the practical operating requirement of the relevant scheme, which will then be launched next year at the earliest. The Government expects that the above measures will increase the deterrent effect and enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement departments in combating illicit cigarettes.

The relevant Government departments, including the TACO, the C&ED, the Police and the HD will continue to work together to enhance intelligence exchange and deepen the co-operation mechanism, as well as to make adjustments to their enforcement strategies having regard to the actual situation, and to take joint enforcement actions and refer suspected illegal cases, with a view to taking forward the work of tobacco control and enforcing the relevant legislation.

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## **LCQ6: Commemorative activities for**

# 80th anniversary of victory in War of Resistance

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yung and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

This year marks the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance, and it is learnt that the Government will host a series of commemorative activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will set up a "Preparatory Committee for commemorative activities for the 80th anniversary of Hong Kong's victory in the War of Resistance" led by the Working Group on Patriotic Education, and extensively invite the participation of representatives of community organisations to co-ordinate the relevant activities; if so, of the expected time to commence such work;

(2) of the key activities to be hosted to commemorate the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance, so as to strengthen the sense of patriotism among the public while disseminating the message of peace;

(3) how it will take the opportunity to make good use of the rich resources of the history of the War of Resistance in Hong Kong to promote the development of red tourism; and

(4) how it will collaborate with the relevant Central authorities and other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in jointly commemorating the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureaux, a consolidated reply in response to the questions raised by the Hon Chan Yung is as follows:

This year marks the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance. The Chief Executive announced in the 2024 Policy Address that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will host commemorative activities to strengthen the sense of patriotism. In terms of implementation, the Working Group on Patriotic Education led by the Chief Secretary for Administration will co-ordinate relevant bureaux and departments in launching a series of commemorative activities, including:

(a) The HKSAR Government will host a solemn official ceremony at the Hong Kong City Hall Memorial Garden on September 3, the Victory Day of the War of Resistance, to honour the occasion. The commemoration will feature a rendition of the national anthem, ceremonial flag raising, a Rifle Volley by the Police Rifle Squad, an observation of silence, and bowing in tribute. The attendance at the ceremony will include the Chief Executive and senior government officials, representatives of the organs of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong, former Chief Executives, members of the Executive Council, members of the Legislative Council, representatives of war veterans' groups, HKSAR deputies to the National People's Congress, HKSAR members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, representatives of District Councils, representatives of Heung Yee Kuk, representatives of district organisations, members of uniformed groups and youth groups, etc;

(b) With the funding and support from the Home Affairs Department, three major associations, namely the Hong Kong Island Federation, the Kowloon Federation of Associations and the New Territories Association of Societies, will organise activities on September 3 to commemorate the victory of the War of Resistance. Examples of these activities include a talk by veterans to recount their experiences during the War and a film show about the War, with a view to deepening the understanding among members of the public about the historical events of the War of Resistance on the Mainland and in Hong Kong and fostering their sense of patriotism;

(c) The Hong Kong Museum of History (HKMH) under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is currently liaising closely with the National Museum of China on co-organising a large-scale thematic exhibition scheduled to launch in early September for a period of about three months. The exhibition will mainly feature our country's unyielding spirit of resistance during the War, as well as contents on Hong Kong people's support for the Mainland compatriots, and the three years and eight months of Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, with a view to giving Hong Kong citizens (particularly the younger generation) a better understanding of the War of Resistance;

(d) The Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence (MWRCD) is planning to collaborate with the Guangdong Museum of Revolutionary History to jointly organise a thematic exhibition on the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance. The exhibition will focus on an overview of the anti war activities of the Chinese Communist Party in Guangdong Province and Hong Kong during the War of Resistance. Through the display of valuable exhibits, historical photographs and multi-media programmes, the exhibition aims to enlighten the public about the history of the War, thereby promoting and inheriting the spirit of patriotic education;

(e) The LCSD museums will also organise a diverse array of public and educational programmes, including thematic talks, workshops, field trips, and film screenings to raise public awareness of the history of the War of Resistance;

(f) The LCSD will, from August to December, organise a thematic talk "Reapproaching the Japanese Occupation of Hong Kong from interactive map, 1941-1945" and a book display "Days of War" at the Hong Kong Central Library, as well as book displays, photo exhibitions and thematic talks at public libraries in different districts to introduce relevant collections and information, so as to enable citizens to learn about the history of the War of Resistance as well as the unity and resilience of the Chinese people in the fight for peace. These include the thematic talk cum roving exhibition "War of Resistance in Hong Kong: Sai Kung" to be held in Sai Kung District, guided tours of the Hong Kong Sha Tau Kok Anti-war Memorial Hall to be held in North District, and thematic talk series "Wartime Sham Shui Po" to be held in Sham Shui Po District, etc;

(g) In terms of teachers and students, the Education Bureau (EDB) has always attached great emphasis on the education about the history of the War of Resistance, and continuously organises relevant activities for teachers and students to help them understand the history of the War and the heroic deeds of the martyrs, experience the indomitable spirit of the Chinese nation, learn to cherish peace through remembering history, as well as cultivate their sense of identity, belonging, responsibility and patriotic spirit. On teacher training activities, the EDB plans to organise an academic seminar on the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance, lecture on the contributions of the Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade of the East River Column, visits to places such as the Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison Exhibition Center at Ngong Shuen Chau Barracks, the Hong Kong Sha Tau Kok Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall, and the Wu Kau Tang Martyrs Memorial Garden, as well as a study tour for teachers in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area themed on the footprints in relation to the War of Resistance. On student activities, the EDB plans to roll out the "Visual Narrative of the War of Resistance: Territory-wide Creative Competition", the History e-Reading Award Scheme themed on the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance, the second "Learn from Museums – Novice Curator Training Programme" co-organised with the Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence, as well as field study activities related to the history of the War of Resistance in both the local region and the Mainland; and

(h) The Information Services Department is actively planning to collaborate with relevant government organisations on programme production under the theme of "Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of Victory in the War of Resistance", so as to promote patriotic education through storytelling in a vivid manner.

To make good use of the abundant resources relating to the history of the War of Resistance in Hong Kong to promoting characteristic tourism, the Tourism Commission, in collaboration with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), has been taking forward the Enhancement of Hiking Trails (the Project) since 2018 to enhance the tourism supporting facilities of 20 hiking trails in country parks which are popular and with tourism potential. The Project covers hiking trails relating to war history, namely Lion Rock Historic Walk, Shing Mun War Relics Trail and Luk Keng War

Relics Trail. The AFCD completed the enhancement works at Lion Rock Historic Walk in December 2023, whereas those at Shing Mun War Relics Trail and Luk Keng War Relics Trail are expected to be completed progressively in 2026. In addition, the AFCD installed at the Robin's Nest Country Park interpretation panels about its war relics and the deeds of nearby villagers at the War of Resistance, and produced a video for broadcasting on social media platforms, thereby showcasing the history of the War of Resistance at the Robin's Nest Country Park. The HKSAR Government will continue to encourage the trade to make better use of the abundant resources relating to the history of the War of Resistance to develop more unique tourism products covering different themes of in-depth tours.

Besides, to preserve the history of the War of Resistance in Hong Kong, the MWRCDC has commenced relevant historical research with a view to providing related historical information for the War of Resistance heritage trails to be set up by responsible government departments in the future. The information will offer the public an insight into the history of the War of Resistance, and enrich their travel experience.

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## **Government appoints Professor Tsui Lap-chee as expert advisor to Task Group on New Medical School**

The Government announced today (February 26) the appointment of Professor Tsui Lap-chee as an expert advisor to the Task Group on New Medical School.

The Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, said, "Professor Tsui is an internationally renowned expert in the field of molecular human genetics, the incumbent Chair of the College Council of the Hong Kong Chu Hai College and the former President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, with extensive experience in leading both the higher education sector and the area of academic research. The next stage of the work of the Task Group will be to assess the proposals submitted by universities interested in establishing the new medical school according to the devised parameters. I am very confident that Professor Tsui will definitely be able to provide invaluable advice to the Task Group in its new stage of work, particularly in the consideration of the governance and scientific research development strategies of the new medical school."

The Chief Executive announced in his 2024 Policy Address that the Government supports the establishment of a third medical school by a local university, with a view to nurturing more talented medical practitioners in support of the local healthcare system to provide quality service, while at

the same time driving Hong Kong's development into an international medical training, research and innovation hub. The Government invited seasoned local, Mainland and overseas academics for medical teaching and university management, professionals, the Chairman of the Medical Council of Hong Kong and the President of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, together with relevant Directors of Bureaux and Heads of Departments of the Government, to form the Task Group. The Task Group is responsible for devising the direction and parameters for the new medical school, as well as selecting a suitable university for setting up the new medical school.

Since its establishment in October 2024, the Task Group has formulated the directions and parameters for establishing the new medical school, and [issued a letter of invitation in December last year to local universities interested in establishing the new medical school for submission of proposals by March 17 this year.](#) In the next stage of the work of the Task Group, concrete criteria for assessing proposals will be formulated to ensure that a qualified and eligible university will be selected in a transparent and fair manner for the establishment of the new medical school. It is anticipated that the Task Group will complete its assessments and make recommendations to the Government within this year.

The biography of Professor Tsui is as follows:

Professor Tsui is an expert in the field of molecular human genetics with outstanding achievements in the realms of genetic research and medical innovation. Professor Tsui served as the 14th President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong and is the Founding President of the Hong Kong Academy of Sciences. He is also currently the Chairman of the University of Hong Kong Foundation for Educational Development and Research, and Emeritus University Professor at the University of Toronto.

The membership of the Task Group with effect from February 26, 2025, is as follows:

Co-chairmen

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Secretary for Education

Secretary for Health

Alternate Co-chairmen

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Permanent Secretary for Education/Under Secretary for Education

Permanent Secretary for Health/Under Secretary for Health

Expert advisors

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Chairman of the Medical Council of Hong Kong

President of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (or representative)

Professor Nivritti Gajanan Patil

Professor Joseph Sung Jao-yiu

Professor Zhao Yupei

Professor Tsui Lap-chee \*

Mr Philip Tsai Wing-chung

Official members

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Permanent Secretary for Development (Planning and Lands) (or representative)  
Permanent Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry (or representative)

Secretary-General of the University Grants Committee (or representative)

Director of Health (or representative)

Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority (or representative)

Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Deputy Secretary for Health 3

Commissioner for Primary Healthcare (or representative)

\* New appointment

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## **LCQ22: COVID-19 Vaccination Programme**

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Chan Wing-kwong and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

To safeguard public health, the Government is implementing a territory-wide COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (the Vaccination Programme) free of charge for eligible persons. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of received vaccination doses and vaccination rates under the Vaccination Programme in the past two years; among them, the respective numbers of received doses and vaccination rates for initial and booster doses;

(2) of the respective numbers of received booster doses and booster vaccination rates in the past two years for various priority groups eligible for free booster vaccination, i.e. (i) older adults aged 50 or above (including those living in residential care homes), (ii) persons aged 18 to 49 years with underlying comorbidities, (iii) persons with immunocompromising conditions aged six months and above, (iv) pregnant women, and (v) healthcare workers;

(3) of the financial expenditure incurred by the Government in implementing the Vaccination Programme in each of the past two years;

(4) whether it knows the number of deaths due to COVID-19 infection in the past two years, and the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses received by the

deceased prior to their death; and

(5) since the restoration of normalcy after the pandemic, what measures the Government has put in place to promote COVID-19 vaccination among the public, particularly high-risk groups, in order to effectively prevent COVID-19?

Reply:

President,

With the ever evolvement of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the prevention and treatment capacities of the local healthcare system and society as a whole have been enhanced significantly. COVID-19 has been managed as an upper respiratory tract illness by the Government since early 2023. Despite this, the World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that high-risk persons should receive COVID-19 booster doses at appropriate times to lower the risks of serious illness and death. With reference to the recommendations from the WHO as well as the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (JSC) under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH), the Government is currently providing the JN.1 lineage COVID-19 vaccines for eligible individuals aged six months or above.

As the vast majority of the public had past COVID-19 infection, according to the recommendation of the JSC, the Government has simplified the arrangements for initial vaccination, which replaced the previous three-dose definition for initial vaccination, since August 19, 2024. Under the new arrangement, in general, persons aged five or above (regardless of their history of infection with COVID-19) are considered to have completed initial vaccination by receiving one dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. Persons aged six months to four years who have been infected with COVID-19 are considered to have completed initial vaccination by receiving one dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. For those who have not been infected, they should receive two or three doses of vaccines in accordance with the recommendations of the vaccine manufacturers to be considered as having completed initial vaccination. In addition, the JSC recommended that high-risk priority groups, including individuals aged 50 or above and those with chronic diseases, should receive a booster dose at least six months after the last dose or COVID-19 infection (whichever is later), regardless of the number of doses received previously, in order to enhance protection.

Between 2023 and 2024, the activity level of SARS-CoV-2 virus followed a cyclical pattern, with minor waves occurring every four to six months. For example, the virus became active in early January 2024 with a positive rate of 6.8 per cent among respiratory specimens, peaking at 16.8 per cent in early March before decreasing to lower levels in June. The subsequent wave peaked at 9.06 per cent from late July to early August before subsiding. As of the week ending on February 8, 2025, the positive rate for COVID-19 testing remained at a low level of 0.46 per cent. Regarding the monitoring of variant strains, the JN.1 and its descendant lineages were the most prevalent variant strains.

The reply, in consultation with the DH and the Hospital Authority (HA), to the question regarding the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme raised by Professor the Hon Chan Wing-kwong is as follows:

(1) As at January 31, 2025, a total of more than 21 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered under the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. In 2023 and 2024, about 586 000 and about 222 000 doses were administered respectively. The definition for initial vaccination was updated since August 19, 2024. Starting from August 19, 2024, about 61 000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered, including about 1 000 initial doses and about 60 000 booster doses. The estimated proportion of people that completed COVID-19 initial vaccination in Hong Kong is about 94 per cent.

(2) According to the recommendation of the JSC, since April 20, 2023, citizens have to declare themselves as priority groups to continue receiving free boosters. Therefore, the DH only maintains records of the actual number of vaccinations for individuals who declared themselves as belonging to a priority group on or after April 20, 2023.

From April 20, 2023 to 2024, around 342 000 booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered for the self-reported priority groups. The vaccination figures broken down by the priority groups are as follows:

Self-reported priority group	Number of booster doses administered
Persons aged 50 or above and adult residents living in residential care homes	332 000
Healthcare workers	6 000
Persons aged 18 to 49 years with underlying comorbidities	3 000
Persons aged six months or above with immunocompromising conditions	1 000
Pregnant women	Less than 400
Total	Around 342 000

Note: Due to the lack of data on the population size of some priority groups, the vaccination rate cannot be calculated.

(3) The expenditure figures of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 (as at January 31, 2025) were \$230 million and \$124 million respectively.

(4) According to the data of the Deaths Registries, a total of 2 944 cases died of COVID-19 between January 2023 and December 2024, with over 98 per cent involving adults aged 50 or above, and among them, nearly 80 per cent had not received COVID-19 vaccination within six months prior to death. In addition, among those fatal cases with available information, nearly 90 per cent had history of known chronic diseases. The data showed that timely booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines for high-risk persons help lower the risk

of severe illness and death.

(5) Since the launch of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the Government has set up an online booking system which is available around the clock. Members of the public may make a booking through the system for COVID-19 vaccination at Private Clinic COVID-19 Vaccination Stations, Children Community Vaccination Centre, designated general out-patient clinics under the HA, as well as designated Student Health Service Centres, Maternal and Child Health Centres or Elderly Health Centres under the DH. The Government also provides vaccination for adult residents of residential care homes (RCHs) for the elderly and RCHs for persons with disabilities through outreach services under the Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme.

The Centre for Health Protection has been disseminating health messages on prevention of communicable diseases and maintaining personal and environmental hygiene through various channels, such as TV and radio announcements in the public interest, social media, printed media, Health Education Infoline, media and radio interviews, advertisements on public transport, outdoor and digital media. The messages also cover the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. The Centre for Health Protection will continue to strengthen relevant publicity and health education through various channels. The DH has also encouraged and assisted the elderly in the community, especially elderly singletons, to receive necessary vaccines including COVID-19 vaccine via district networks, such as District Services and Community Care Teams. District Elderly Community Centres and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres under the Social Welfare Department, District Health Centres (DHCs) and DHC Expresses under the Health Bureau, as well as Elderly Health Centres under the DH, will also provide assistance to the elderly in need to make online bookings for COVID-19 vaccination.

In addition, the HA provides COVID-19 vaccination services at its 18 designated general out-patient clinics, 13 designated specialist out-patient clinics, the Children Community Vaccination Centre located at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital, as well as its staff vaccination depots. The HA also encourages eligible long-stay patients to receive COVID-19 vaccination to reduce the risk of severe cases and fatalities.

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## **New application fee and raised visa fee for talent and capital investment admission schemes introduced**

The 2025-26 Budget announced that a new application fee will be introduced under various admission schemes to attract talent and capital investors, and the visa/entry permit issuance fees for approved applications

will be raised based on the length of the limit of stay to peg to their costs and reflect the "user pays" principle. To implement these fees, the Immigration (Amendment) Regulation 2025 has been published in the Gazette and came into effect from 11am today (February 26) (commencement time).

With effect from the commencement time, principal applicants under specified admission schemes and their dependants will be required to pay an application fee of \$600 for each application under a specified admission scheme for entry, change of conditions of stay or extension of limit of stay; and the visa/entry permit fee for an approved application will be increased, based on the length of the limit of stay, from the original flat rate of \$230 to \$600 (with a limit of stay of 180 days or below) or \$1,300 (with a limit of stay of 181 days or more). Pursuant to the amended Immigration Regulations (Cap. 115 sub. leg. A), the Director of Immigration has specified that the above fees apply to the following admission schemes:

1. Top Talent Pass Scheme;
2. General Employment Policy;
3. Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals;
4. Quality Migrant Admission Scheme;
5. Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates;
6. Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents;
7. New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme;
8. Capital Investment Entrant Scheme;
9. Technology Talent Admission Scheme; and
10. Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme.

A Government spokesman said, "The various admission schemes for talent and capital investors have been well-received since their introduction or enhancement. The number of applications for different talent admission schemes has grown from around 58 000 in 2022 to more than 221 000 in 2023 and around 208 000 in 2024, representing an increase of more than 250 per cent compared with 2022. Processing such applications involved substantial administrative resources. With reference to the fees charged for similar applications in overseas jurisdictions, the Government has decided to introduce a universal application fee and raise the visa/entry permit issuance fees for applications under the specified schemes to recover as far as possible the administrative costs incurred in processing the applications.

"The Government will continue to review and enhance the various talent admission arrangements, promote Hong Kong's unique strengths and development opportunities, and provide comprehensive support services to incoming talent to attract global talent with diverse backgrounds to pursue development in Hong Kong. We are confident that the newly implemented measures would not affect Hong Kong's quest for talent," the spokesman added.

The existing fees applicable to other types of visas/entry permits other than those applied under the specified schemes remain unchanged.

The list of specified schemes and the fee structure have been uploaded to the dedicated website of the Immigration Department (ImmD)

([www.immd.gov.hk/eng/specifiedschemes.html](http://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/specifiedschemes.html)). For enquiries, please contact the ImmD by enquiry hotline (2824 6111), by fax (2877 7711) or by email ([enquiry@immd.gov.hk](mailto:enquiry@immd.gov.hk)).