

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (May 4), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 15 patients (seven male and eight female, aged 2 to 84) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Appropriate tests have been arranged for the patients.

There are 151 patients under isolation currently. So far, 900 patients who had COVID-19 confirmed or probable infection have been discharged upon recovery.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

\$60 million allowance under AEF in support of cleansing and security staff paid in March

A Government spokesman said today (May 4) that the Government has been making use of the Anti-epidemic Fund to provide allowances to eligible cleansing and security workers engaged by service contractors of the Government and the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA). The first round of funding, which is the allowance for March, amounted to some \$60 million, benefiting some 60 000 workers of over 340 contractors.

Under the measure of the Fund, front-line cleansing workers, toilet attendants and security workers employed by the service contractors can receive a monthly allowance of \$1,000 for a period of no fewer than four months throughout the epidemic period. Eligible workers who have performed duties in March 2020 have received the \$1,000 allowance applicable to that month. Arrangements have been made for the April allowance to be issued concurrently with the salary of that month.

The Government spokesman indicated that front-line workers are not required to submit any application for the allowance. On a monthly basis, procuring departments of the Government and the HA will obtain the headcount of eligible recipients of the allowance from their contractors; relevant

funding will be transferred through the contractors to the workers concerned. The departments and the HA have entered into agreements with their contractors to ensure that the latter transfer the allowance to eligible workers. Front-line workers with enquiries may contact their contractors or the relevant departments.

The allowance aims to provide financial support to cleansing and security staff engaged by government and HA service contractors in anti-epidemic efforts, and gives recognition for their committed services at this critical juncture.

Import of poultry meat and products from Békés County in Hungary suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (May 4) that in view of a notification from the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N8 avian influenza in Békés County in Hungary, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products, including poultry eggs, from the county with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that Hong Kong has currently established a protocol with Hungary for the import of poultry meat but not for poultry eggs. According to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 170 tonnes of frozen poultry meat from Hungary in the first three months of this year.

"The CFS has contacted the Hungarian authorities over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the World Organisation for Animal Health and the relevant authorities on avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

Fatal traffic accident in Tai Po

Police are investigating a fatal traffic accident in Tai Po this morning (May 4) in which a 64-year-old man died.

At 6.43am, a public light bus (PLB) driven by a 71-year-old man and a light goods vehicle (LGV) driven by the 64-year-old man were travelling in sequence along Lam Kam Road towards Tai Po. When approaching Lam Tsuen San Tsuen, the PLB and LGV reportedly collided.

Sustaining no superficial injury, the 64-year-old male driver was rushed to Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital in unconscious state and was certified dead at 7.32am.

Investigation by the Special Investigation Team of Traffic, New Territories North is underway.

Anyone who witnessed the accident or has any information to offer is urged to contact the investigating officers on 3661 3800 or 3661 3858.

Survey on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' Credit Conditions for First Quarter 2020

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (May 4) the results of Survey on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)' Credit Conditions for the first quarter of 2020.

Regarding SMEs' perception of banks' credit approval stance relative to 6 months ago, 69 per cent of the respondents perceived similar or easier credit approval stance in the first quarter of 2020, compared with 73 per cent in the previous quarter. 31 per cent of the respondents perceived more difficult credit approval stance, compared with 27 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 1 in the Annex). While a higher percentage of the respondents perceived more difficult credit approval stance relative to 6 months ago in the first quarter of 2020 than in the previous quarter, the situation was broadly the same as the average results in the second half of 2016. It should also be noted that most respondents did not apply for new credit from banks during the quarter, and SMEs' perception of banks' credit approval stance could be subject to a number of factors. Therefore, the perception of more difficult credit stance may not necessarily reflect any actual difficulties faced by SMEs in obtaining bank credit.

Of those respondents with existing credit lines, 83 per cent reported that banks' stance on existing credit lines was easier or unchanged in the first quarter of 2020, down from 86 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart

2 in the Annex). 17 per cent of the respondents reported tightened banks' stance on existing credit lines in the first quarter of 2020, compared with 14 per cent in the previous quarter. In this survey, tightened stance on existing credit lines denotes a range of possible measures or arrangements, such as reducing unused and used credit lines, raising the interest rate, imposing additional collateral requirements, or shortening loan tenor. Therefore, respondents' indication of banks' stance on existing credit lines may not directly reflect banks' supply of credit to SMEs.

The survey also gauged the results of new credit applications from SMEs. 7 per cent of the respondents reported that they had applied for new bank credit during the first quarter of 2020. Among the respondents who had already known their application outcomes, 84 per cent reported fully or partially successful applications while 16 per cent reported unsuccessful application, similar to the results recorded in the second to the fourth quarters of 2019 (Chart 3 in the Annex).

Owing to small sample sizes of SMEs with existing credit lines (20 per cent of surveyed SMEs) and with new credit applications (7 per cent of surveyed SMEs) during the quarter, the results could be prone to large fluctuations, and hence should be interpreted with care.

About Survey on SMEs' Credit Conditions

In light of the importance of SMEs to the Hong Kong economy and concerns about potential funding difficulties facing SMEs over the past few years, the HKMA has appointed the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) to carry out this survey, starting from the third quarter of 2016. This survey is conducted on a quarterly basis, covering about 2 500 SMEs from different economic sectors each time. The results of this survey can help monitor the development of SMEs' access to bank credit from a demand-side perspective.

The results of this survey should be interpreted with caution. Similar to other opinion surveys, views collected in this survey may be affected by changes in sentiment due to idiosyncratic events that occurred over the survey period, which can make the results prone to fluctuations. Readers are advised to interpret the results together with other economic and financial information. In addition, views collected are limited to the expected direction of inter-quarter changes (e.g. "tighter", "similar" or "easier") without providing information about the magnitude of these changes.

Detailed tables and technical information of this survey are published on the website of the HKPC (<https://www.hkpc.org>).