

FEHD fully steps up Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse anti-epidemic measures

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) said today (July 31) that in view of the recent COVID-19 cases related to the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), the FEHD has decided to fully step up anti-epidemic measures of the slaughterhouse. Starting from 0.00 am on August 1, only persons with negative testing results are permitted to enter the slaughterhouse.

The FEHD has arranged COVID-19 testing for SSSH government staff and stakeholders, including the operator, importers, buyers and transportation companies. Except for the three preliminarily confirmed cases announced yesterday, testing results for other cases are all negative. There are so far a cumulative total of ten cases related to the SSSH, involving seven confirmed cases and three preliminarily tested positive cases.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The Government is very concerned about the cases in relation to SSSH, and has fully stepped up anti-epidemic measures of the slaughterhouse to ensure its smooth operation and that the supply of live pigs will not be affected. The Government and SSSH will continue to strive to ensure operation of the slaughterhouse meets the required hygienic and environmental standards, and that all meat supplied to the market is fit for human consumption.

During the epidemic, the SSSH has required all workers to observe the personal protective equipment guidelines, and implemented the following anti-epidemic measures:

- (1) Install two infrared body temperature monitors at the entrance to ensure that only people with normal body temperature are allowed to enter the slaughterhouse;
- (2) Require all people to wear a mask when they are in the slaughterhouse;
- (3) Require all people to maintain social distancing and avoid gathering;
- (4) Provide alcohol-based handrub and remind all people to keep their hands clean; and
- (5) Remind all those working in the slaughterhouse to observe personal hygiene, and that if they feel unwell, they should seek medical advice as soon as possible and should not go to work.

The spokesman stressed that members of the public need not worried about the food safety of meat slaughtered at the slaughterhouse. According to the current scientific information and advice of the World Health Organization (WHO), it is unlikely that humans will be infected with COVID-19 via food. Members of the public are unlikely to be infected via fresh meat slaughtered at the slaughterhouse.

Nevertheless, the Centre for Food Safety, based on the WHO advice on food safety, reminds the public to maintain personal, food and environmental

hygiene at all times, including washing hands before and after handling raw and cooked foods; separating raw meat and internal organs from cooked foods; cooking food thoroughly, avoiding consuming raw or undercooked animals, etc., so as to ensure food safety.

Make prior work arrangements for typhoons and rainstorms

The Labour Department (LD) today (July 31) reminded employers to make prior work arrangements for staff during and after typhoons and rainstorms. These arrangements not only can ensure the safety of employees and smooth operation of establishments, but also are conducive to maintaining good labour-management relations.

"Employers should make prior work arrangements for staff and contingency measures during and after typhoons and rainstorms. In drawing up and implementing the work arrangements, employers should give prime consideration to employees' safety and the feasibility for employees to travel to and from their workplaces. Employers should also give consideration as much as possible to the situations faced by individual employees, such as their place of residence and the road and traffic conditions in the vicinity, and adopt a sympathetic and flexible approach with due regard to their actual difficulties and needs," an LD spokesman said.

"To avoid misunderstanding, disputes and confusion, employers should draw up the work arrangements in consultation with employees and make appropriate updates or amendments based on the experience of each occasion and the needs of both employers and employees, as well as the actual situations."

The work arrangements should cover the following matters:

- * Arrangements in respect of reporting for duty;
- * Arrangements in respect of release from work;
- * Arrangements in respect of resumption of work (e.g. the number of hours within which employees should resume duty after the warning concerned is cancelled, and when safety and traffic conditions allow);
- * Arrangements regarding working hours, wages and allowances (e.g. calculation of wages and allowances in respect of reporting for duty and absence); and
- * Special arrangements in respect of essential staff in times of adverse weather.

"Employers should conduct timely and realistic assessment of whether there is any need for requiring essential staff to report for duty when a

typhoon or rainstorm warning is in force. In assessing the need for essential staff, employers should take into account the safety of employees, including the feasibility for employees to travel to and from their workplaces in adverse weather. Employers should also consider the business nature, operational needs and urgency of service, with due regard to the manpower requirements, staffing establishment and individual needs of employees. Employers should require only absolutely essential staff to report for duty in adverse weather or when the post-super typhoon 'extreme conditions' announcement is in force and the number of essential staff should be kept to the minimum as far as possible. When weather conditions continue to worsen and public transport services are to be suspended shortly, employers should release their staff as soon as practicable.

"When a Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement is issued during working hours, employers should release employees from work in stages as soon as practicable. To ensure the safety of employees and to enable them to arrive home before suspension of public transport services, employees who have mobility problems (for example, pregnant employees or those with disability), employees who rely on transport services which are prone to being affected by adverse weather conditions (for example, ferry services) for commuting to and from work, and those who work in or are living in remote areas (for example, outlying islands) should be given priority to leave. Other employees should be released later in stages according to their travelling distance or the time required for returning home.

"Under special situations, if it is necessary for employees to report for duty under adverse weather conditions, employers should discuss with them in advance the work arrangements and contingency measures. If public transport services are suspended or limited when Typhoon Warning Signal No. 8 (T8) or above is in force, employers should provide safe transport services for employees travelling to and from workplaces, or grant them an extra travelling allowance.

"As typhoons and rainstorms are natural occurrences that cannot be avoided, for employees who are not able to report for duty or resume work on time due to adverse weather conditions, employers should not withhold their wages, good attendance bonus or allowances without reasons. Employers should enquire into the reasons and give due consideration to the exceptional circumstances in each case and should not penalise or dismiss the employee concerned rashly," he said.

The spokesman also reminded employers to observe the statutory liabilities and requirements under the Employment Ordinance, the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance, the Employees' Compensation Ordinance and the Minimum Wage Ordinance.

Employers should also note that they have an obligation to provide and maintain a safe working environment for their employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance.

"If employees are required to work in times of typhoons and rainstorms, employers should ensure that the risks at work are reduced as far as reasonably practicable," the spokesman said.

Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, employers are liable to pay compensation for death or injury incurred when employees are travelling by a direct route from their residence to their workplace, or from their workplace back to their residence after work, four hours before or after working hours on a day when T8 or above or a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is in force.

The LD has published the "Code of Practice in Times of Typhoons and Rainstorms", which outlines the major principles, the framework, the reference guidelines and information on relevant legislation for reference. The booklet can be obtained from branch offices of the Labour Relations Division or downloaded from the department's webpage (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/Rainstorm.pdf).

EAC understands and respects Government's decision to postpone 2020 Legislative Council General Election

The following is issued on behalf of the Electoral Affairs Commission:

In response to the Government's announcement of postponement of the 2020 Legislative Council General Election (LCGE) today (July 31), the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) expressed understanding and respect over the Government's decision.

A spokesman for the EAC said, "The 2020 LCGE was originally scheduled for September 6. The EAC learnt that in view of the severe epidemic situation of COVID-19, the Government has decided to postpone the 2020 LCGE. The EAC understands and respects the Government's decision, and will coordinate on the practical arrangements for postponement."

"In fact, in the light of the latest epidemic situation, the EAC wrote to the Chief Executive on July 28 expressing concerns over impacts of the COVID-19 on the election," the spokesman said.

"The Registration and Electoral Office (REO) has all along been closely liaising with the Centre for Health Protection on the precautions for COVID-19 in this LCGE and working on plans of preventive measures. Advice on preventive measures focuses on two major aspects: maintaining social distancing and staying alert to personal hygiene. While maintaining social distancing and personal hygiene complement each other, co-operation from

members of the public is necessary.

"The REO has been working proactively to set up more polling stations and recruit more polling staff with a view to speeding up the diversion of crowd. Over 610 polling stations will be set up to serve more than 4.46 million eligible electors on the polling day originally scheduled for September 6. The REO endeavours to implement various personal hygiene measures such as checking of body temperature before entering into polling stations, wearing of masks and use of alcohol-based handrub. However, taking into account the experience gained from the 2019 District Council Ordinary Election where more than 70 per cent of electors cast their votes, group gathering inside and outside the polling stations with difficulty in maintaining safe social distancing is foreseeable and inevitable.

"On the other hand, the REO has spared no effort in borrowing larger venues for use as polling stations. However, since Hong Kong is densely populated, there are limitations on sizes of the polling stations, as well as finding conveniently located and suitable polling stations. The REO will also set up more ballot paper issuing desks to speed up the issuing process. Nevertheless, the issuing process involves indispensable procedures such as communication among polling staff and electors, identity verification, transaction of documents and ballot papers. The contact and interaction between staff and electors are diametrically contrary to the advice of maintaining social distancing.

"Furthermore, the existing legislation stipulates that the ballots of traditional functional constituencies and the District Council (second) functional constituency must be counted centrally. To ensure that the election is conducted in a fair and open manner, the counting of votes must be open. The central counting station, which is proposed to be set up by the REO, is expected to accommodate nearly 10 000 people including candidates and their agents, the media and members of the public who will observe the counting process that needs to be carried out overnight. Apart from the risk of group gathering, the staff at the central counting station require frequent exchange of documents. Basically it is hard to observe social distancing. Even if disease prevention measures are implemented, it will be very challenging to safeguard the health of the staff and other attendees.

"In addition, many people are currently under compulsory quarantine. While we are committed to safeguarding their voting rights, we must also take into account the concern of other electors if they can go to the polling stations at ease to cast their votes.

"It is worth noting that, in the month prior to the polling day, the REO needs to arrange some 40 large-scale training sessions for over 30 000 electoral staff, during which large group gathering is expected.

The EAC spokesman pointed out that even though the REO implements various disease prevention measures at polling stations with its utmost efforts, large group gathering is still unavoidable. Requiring all electoral staff and electors to observe social distancing at all time is also

difficult. The spokesman reiterated again that the EAC is an independent, apolitical and impartial body which decides on and supervise public election matters in accordance with actual and objective considerations and related legislation.

The spokesman added that follow-up arrangements of the postponement such as how candidates calculate election expenses will be announced in due course after co-ordination between the REO, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and other related departments. Candidates are reminded to keep all invoices and receipts concerned.

In view of the Government's decision to postpone the 2020 LCGE, the lots drawing session for candidates to allocate number on ballot papers and online briefing for candidates originally scheduled for August 4 and 6 respectively are cancelled.

LegCo General Election postponed for a year

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government announced today (July 31) that, amid the severe COVID-19 epidemic situation, the Chief Executive in Council has decided to postpone the 2020 Legislative Council (LegCo) General Election, originally scheduled for September 6, 2020, for a year to September 5, 2021, in order to protect public safety and public health as well as ensure elections are conducted openly and fairly.

For this, the Chief Executive in Council has invoked the Emergency Regulations Ordinance (Cap. 241) to make the Emergency (Date of General Election) (Seventh Term of the Legislative Council) Regulation. The Regulation specifies the new election date, brings the current electoral process to an end, and deals with such matters as election expenses and donations. The Regulation was gazetted today and will come into effect tomorrow (August 1).

A Government spokesman said, "The epidemic situation has been extremely severe since the outbreak in early July. There is an increasing risk of a major community outbreak that may lead to a collapse of the local public hospital system, which would be a significant public crisis.

"The LegCo General Election is massive in scale. A situation with millions of voters casting their votes on the same day will create a very high infection risk. Under the existing regulation to prohibit group gatherings, it would not be possible for candidates to carry out any meaningful rallying activities. Further, a large number of voters are living, working and studying in the Mainland, while many are stranded overseas. These

voters will not be able to return to Hong Kong to vote in view of the border control measures. In addition, elderly voters may refrain from voting amid the severe epidemic situation due to their higher infection risk.

"In view of the above factors, if the election is held on September 6 as scheduled, it will be difficult for the election to be a fair and open one. It may also undermine the safety of the voters, the candidates and their supporters as well as the polling staff. Therefore the HKSAR Government had to make the difficult but necessary decision to postpone the election.

"The current wave of the epidemic is likely to last for weeks or even longer. There may also be a winter surge. The LegCo performs important and substantive functions, and has an annual business cycle. Further, preparation work and the voter registration exercise will take months before an election can be held. It is reasonable and in the public interest to postpone the election for a year."

As a matter of fact, many elections have been postponed across the globe due to COVID-19. Among others, the United Kingdom postponed the local council elections and the metro-mayoral elections due to take place on May 7, 2020, for a year to May 6, 2021.

"Under the existing Legislative Council Ordinance (Cap. 542) and the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), the Government cannot postpone the LegCo General Election for a year on the grounds of ensuring the openness and fairness of the election as well as protecting public health. As the present epidemic situation can be regarded as an occasion of public danger and emergency, invoking the Emergency Regulations Ordinance (Cap. 241) to make an emergency regulation to postpone the election is the only viable option," the spokesman added.

The Court of Appeal upheld the constitutionality of the Emergency Regulations Ordinance in a judgment in April 2020. The Ordinance enables the Chief Executive in Council to legislate speedily and effectively to meet all and every kind of emergency and public danger.

Article 69 of the Basic Law stipulates that the term of the LegCo shall be four years, except the first term which shall be two years. Therefore the current term of the LegCo must end on September 30, 2020. While the Emergency (Date of General Election) (Seventh Term of the Legislative Council) Regulation can postpone the election date of the seventh-term LegCo for a year, it cannot deal with the lacuna in the LegCo between September 30, 2020, and the election of the seventh-term LegCo.

For this, the Chief Executive has submitted an urgent report to the Central People's Government seeking its support and guidance. The State Council replied and expressed support for the decision made by the Chief Executive in Council in accordance with the law to postpone the election of the seventh-term LegCo by one year on the grounds of public interest and in light of the concrete circumstances of Hong Kong. With respect to how to deal with the lacuna of the LegCo arising from the postponement, the Central

People's Government will make a submission in accordance with the law to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for its decision. The HKSAR Government shall properly handle work related to postponement of the seventh-term LegCo election in accordance with the law.

Update on investigation into case of Legionnaires' disease in hospital

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (July 31) reported an update on its investigation into a case of Legionnaires' disease (LD) in Siu Lam Hospital (SLH) announced earlier.

The CHP identified one additional patient related to the case. The patient is a 36-year-old man with underlying illness who stayed in the same ward in SLH as the Legionella cases announced on July 24 and 29. He developed fever on July 27. His clinical diagnosis was pneumonia. His condition is currently stable.

The patient's sputum specimen tested positive for Legionella species upon laboratory testing. Investigation is ongoing.

"Epidemiological investigations with SLH are ongoing to identify potential sources of infection, high-risk exposure and clusters, if any. Relevant water samples and environmental swabs have been collected from potential sources for laboratory testing," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Tracing of contacts including staff and in-patients in ward is ongoing and those identified have been put under medical surveillance. The CHP has provided health advice against LD to staff and in-patients, including those with weakened immunity who should use sterile or boiled water for drinking, tooth brushing and mouth rinsing. Investigation is ongoing.

Legionellae are found in various environmental settings and grow well in warm water (20 to 45 degrees Celsius). They can be found in aqueous environments such as water tanks, hot and cold water systems, cooling towers, whirlpools and spas, water fountains and home apparatus which support breathing. People may become infected when they breathe in contaminated droplets (aerosols) and mist generated by artificial water systems, or when handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes.

Immunocompromised persons should:

- Use sterile or boiled water for drinking, tooth brushing and mouth rinsing;

- Avoid using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices. A shower may also generate small aerosols; and
- If using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices, fill the water tank with only sterile or cooled freshly boiled water, and not water directly from the tap. Also, clean and maintain humidifiers/devices regularly according to manufacturers' instructions. Never leave stagnant water in a humidifier/device. Empty the water tank, wipe all surfaces dry, and change the water daily.

The public should observe the health advice below:

- Observe personal hygiene;
- Do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption;
- Strainers in water taps and shower heads should be inspected, cleaned, descaled and disinfected regularly or at a frequency recommended by the manufacturer;
- If a fresh-water plumbing system is properly maintained, it is not necessary to install domestic water filters. Use of water filters is not encouraged as clogging occurs easily, which can promote growth of micro-organisms. In case water filters are used, the pore size should be 0.2 micrometres (μm) and the filter needs to be changed periodically according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Drain and clean water tanks of buildings at least quarterly;
- Drain or purge for at least one minute infrequently used water outlets (e.g. water taps, shower heads and hot water outlets) and stagnant points of the pipework weekly or before use;
- Seek and follow doctors' professional advice regarding the use and maintenance of home respiratory devices and use only sterile water (not distilled or tap water) to clean and fill the reservoir. Clean and maintain the device regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions. After cleaning/disinfection, rinse the device with sterile water, cooled freshly boiled water or water filtered with 0.2 μm filters. Never leave stagnant water in the device. Empty the water tank, keep all surfaces dry, and change the water daily; and
- When handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes:
 1. Wear gloves and a face mask;
 2. Water gardens and compost gently using low pressure;
 3. Open composted potting mixes slowly and make sure the opening is directed away from the face;
 4. Wet the soil to reduce dust when potting plants; and
 5. Avoid working in poorly ventilated places such as enclosed greenhouses.

The public may visit the CHP's [LD page](#), the [Code of Practice for Prevention of LD](#) and the [Housekeeping Guidelines for Cold and Hot Water Systems for Building Management](#) of the Prevention of LD Committee, and the CHP's [risk-based strategy](#) for prevention and control of LD.