

Special arrangements for services of Social Welfare Department

In view of the latest epidemic situation, a spokesperson for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) today (July 19) announced that SWD's service units providing direct public services for members of the public will only maintain their provision of emergency services and essential services from July 20 to 26.

While departmental hotline service will be in operation as normal, other services such as those of Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) will only be provided on a limited scale.

The SSFUs are temporarily closed to the public but maintain services on a limited scale by other modes of service delivery. Relevant application forms are provided next to the drop boxes of SSFUs and can be downloaded from the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk). Completed forms can be returned to the relevant SSFUs by post, fax or email or through drop boxes of the SSFUs. After receiving the applications, the SSFU staff will contact applicants for processing their applications. For enquiries, please call the SSFU staff on duty during office hours.

The IFSCs will continue to be open to the public but will only provide casework services with extended hours service suspended.

Service users are advised to call the hotline number 2343 2255 for details of the service provision. To reduce the risk of infection arising from gatherings of people, service users are advised to contact the staff of the service units by telephone in advance, so that interviews can be scheduled as appropriate. All visitors must put on masks, have their body temperature checked and maintain social distancing.

Meanwhile, the SWD has strengthened infection control at all service units. Staff will be reminded to take necessary infection control measures.

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference today (July 19). Also joining were the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-
kwong; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; and the Chief

Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Mrs Lam, you've just announced about reintroducing work from home arrangement for civil servants. Could you explain why didn't the Government impose this arrangement earlier, at the very start of this new wave of outbreak? Could you explain this policy shift? And secondly, do you have any plans to cancel the exemption from the mandatory quarantine that the Government has given to certain groups of people arriving in Hong Kong, for example many people from the business sector? If not, what's the justification for leaving an obvious gap open in our infection control efforts? And thirdly, the Government has started providing tests for some high-risk people such as taxi drivers, but some experts have pointed out that an extensive testing like this will put enormous strain on our healthcare system when more and more people are diagnosed with the virus. Are you confident that our healthcare and quarantine facilities will be able to handle a potential surge of these new identified cases? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I will invite the Secretary for the Civil Service to address the first question about the civil service working from home. As far as the two other issues, I think we have just issued quite a lengthy press release to address the question of exemptions, because we realise that people have somehow put the blame on these exemption categories for the latest wave of COVID-19, which is not substantiated. The exemptions categories are related to the daily living of Hong Kong people and the continued economic activities in Hong Kong. The largest group of exempted category will be the truck drivers, for example. They have to continue to transport food, daily necessities from the Mainland to Hong Kong. The exempted category will be aircrew and seamen, who have to operate airplanes and cargo ships in order to bring the goods, and sometimes people, to and out of Hong Kong. The government operations cover not only the Hong Kong SAR Government but all the consular staff in Hong Kong. They have to come to change their consul-general, they have to replace and so on. There are a lot of essential activities that have to go on, even when the city is in the situation of being restricted. I think this is quite a prevalent practice in other jurisdictions. It is not quite right to say that this is a gap. This is deliberate, this is provided for under the ordinance.

As far as those for business, it's now down to a very, very modest scale, because it's mainly for going into the Mainland, but the Mainland has imposed a 14-day quarantine, so I do not realise there's a large number of people going into the Mainland on the basis of our exemption because there is another 14-day exemption, and that was the cause for all those discussions on the health code to facilitate this essential travel. For the time being this is not an issue because very few people are travelling under the Hong Kong SAR Government's exemptions because of the restrictions imposed by the other side. I hope this point is now clarified. All these exemptions are related to Hong Kong's economic activities to serve the people of Hong Kong.

As far as tests, I think the experts' view is about the so-called extensive testing of the whole population, the 7.5 million people, going

through the test. I have not heard my experts telling me that it is not right to test the high-risk groups in order to find out, as early as possible, the infected cases so that they can be put under isolation and be treated and as a result do not spread this virus further in the community. To do an extensive population-wide test, which has been adopted in some other cities, to us at the moment is not very realistic because we just don't have that testing capacity. We need to prioritise the testing capacity that Hong Kong has. The approach that we have adopted – one is the tier one to tier eight, which are either cases going into hospitals or visiting private clinics, and the second will be the four high-risk categories. The third will be whenever there's a confirmed case, then we try to distribute as many specimen bottles as possible so that people in the vicinity could also be tested, both for the public health reason and also to address their concern.

Secretary for the Civil Service: As regards the working arrangement for civil servants, we have been monitoring the epidemic situation very closely. I think the experience in the past six months tells us that it is always a balance among three things. First is the epidemic situation. Second is the impact on economic activities and people's livelihood. And the third is the public's reaction.

As far as the Government is concerned, provision of public services of course is our priority, and the public have expected us to do so. So actually as early as last Sunday, because of the rising local cases, my bureau has already issued a reminder to all bureaux and departments reminding them to put in place and enforce rigorously all the prevention measures, infection control measures and social distancing measures in bureaux and departments, in order that we could provide public services as far as possible. Also, now we have sufficient supply of masks, protective equipment and also measures in the offices as regards the partitions and all that. That is why we continue with the provision of public services and at the same time we have already introduced staggered working hours and lunch hours, cancellations of large group meetings etc.

When the Government announced the tightening measures last week, the focus was on, because a lot of the local cases arise from social gatherings and eateries and all that, so you could see that our tightening measures focus on the no dining-in in the evening, and also the prohibition of activities at specified premises etc. Since then we have been very closely monitoring the situation and also the implementation of all these social distancing measures and infection control measures in bureaux and departments. On Thursday and Friday, we have also issued specific reminders to bureaux and departments. As we observe the trend, we of course note the increasing number of cases and the situation is actually very severe and that warrants further tightening up of measures. That is why we announce work from home arrangement for civil servants, meaning that the Government will not provide non-emergency and non-essential services with effect from tomorrow. Of course that will have an impact on the provision of services but I think that is the price that we have to pay at this juncture. So you can see that we monitor the situation closely, we introduce targeted measures as and when necessary. And if the situation warrants, we introduce the measures without

any hesitation. Thank you very much.

Reporter: I'd like to ask if you would consider making the guidelines for nursing homes mandatory as they're currently only a suggestion and it's voluntary for nursing homes to take tests, it's only voluntary for them. Would you consider making these guidelines compulsory? The second question is related to the AsiaWorld-Expo. You said you would make it into a quarantine facility if there are not enough. How long would it take to convert the AsiaWorld-Expo? And finally could you please elaborate on which type of spaces you consider as indoor public places? Does this mean that residents will have to also wear masks during, like, in their offices? Which kind of places exactly are indoor public places and who will be taking over the enforcement of that? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The first question about guidelines for elderly homes, I have to defer to Dr Law. As far as how long it will take for us to transform AWE (AsiaWorld-Expo), Secretary Chan, and Secretary Chan will also have to address your question about indoor public places.

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: The guidelines have been continuously monitored and also been revised from time to time. Our Social Welfare Department colleagues have been monitoring the situation very closely. We have, including residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities, slightly over 1 000 homes. Our teams have been visiting them from time to time to ensure their compliance. If there is really a need and we see that compliance is an issue, then it may become necessary, but at the present moment we consider that the compliance and situation, overall speaking, are satisfactory. In particular, we know that the situation in private homes can be a concern, so we pay more visits to those homes to ensure their compliance.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your question. As far as the preparation for the AWE is concerned, the Chief Executive has earlier said there are two purposes. One is for decanting our elderly homes in case there will be more outbreaks. And second, it is for use by the Hospital Authority, some isolation facilities for the Hospital Authority. So we have already started looking into the AWE and check, for example, the air changes and also other facilities within the AWE. And we are also trying our best to put in the AWE, for example, the required furniture, such as beds. So those are almost ready and we hope the first of the halls should be ready to work at the end of next week.

Your second question is about to mandate people to wear mask in public indoor places. Colleagues are now working with DoJ very closely on writing the legislation and directions. But of course, there are already definitions of indoor places, for example, we have other bills that define what is an indoor place, and what is a public place. So again, there are existing definitions. So we will continue to work on it and try to issue it as soon as possible.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

Latest arrangement of Inland Revenue Department public services

In order to achieve more rigorous social distancing to stop COVID-19 from further spreading in the community, the Inland Revenue Department announced today (July 19) that from July 20, the department will suspend the provision of all of its services, except the following:

Offices	Opening hours
Central Enquiry Counter (only for enquiries relating to tax clearance for taxpayers leaving Hong Kong)	From 9am to noon; 1.30pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday
Central Telephone Enquiry	From 9am to 12.30pm; 1.30pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday
Business Registration Office	From 9am to noon; 1.30pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday*
Stamp Office	From 9am to noon; 1.30pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday

* For service users who have made online appointments for counter services before 9am on a day, please come to the Business Registration Office at 9am or 10am of the day; for those who have made online appointments for counter services after 4pm on a day, please come to the Business Registration Office at 2pm of the day.

The department appeals to members of the public for their understanding that the above services will only be provided at a much reduced scale and that services in all other areas will not be provided at the service counters. They should also be prepared to experience a longer waiting time before they can be served. The department encourages the public to use its electronic services to handle their tax affairs as much as possible. A list of such services can be found in the department's website at www.ird.gov.hk/eng/ese/index.htm.

The department further announced that deadlines for tax payments, lodgement of objections and holdover applications, and submission of tax returns and information that fall between July 20 and July 26 will be automatically extended to July 27.

The department will review the situation and make further announcements as necessary.

Special arrangements for FSD's fire protection work

In view of the severity of the local epidemic situation, the Government needs to take further measures in order to significantly reduce the flow of people and social contacts to stop COVID-19 from further spreading in the community. Starting from tomorrow (July 20), fire protection units of the Fire Services Department (FSD) will provide emergency services and essential public services. The FSD will make special arrangements for licence and acceptance applications. Meanwhile, the Shroff Office of the Licensing and Certification Command Headquarters located on 5/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building will also provide limited services. To reduce social contact, members of the public are encouraged to settle payments electronically as much as practicable. For further details, please refer to the payment methods contained in the payment notice.

For enquiries regarding licensing matters, including fire services certificate, dangerous goods licence, application for dangerous goods vehicle inspection, fire service installations acceptance inspection, compliance inspection of ventilating system and fee payment, please call hotline 2733 7619 during office hours.

Regarding matters relating to the collection of building plans at the Fire Safety Command Headquarters on 7/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building, please call 2170 9665 during office hours for special arrangement if necessary.

For complaints regarding fire hazards or dangerous goods, please call the FSD Complaint Hotline 2723 8787.

Transport Department's latest service arrangements

To align with the special work arrangements announced by the Government to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the community, the Transport Department (TD) said today (July 19) that it will adjust public services from

July 20 until further notice. Details are as follows:

Licensing and related services

(1) The Licensing Offices at Admiralty, Cheung Sha Wan, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin will suspend walk-in counter services, but all staff of the Licensing Offices will continue to work at full strength to process applications submitted by applicants with online appointments and submitted by drop-in boxes, by post, or online. During the suspension of walk-in counter services, the daily quota for online appointment of counter services for renewal of full driving licence/ vehicle licence, transfer of vehicle ownership or application for international driving permit will be increased daily from the current 4 500 to 9 000 to cater for the service need of the public. The opening period of 10 weeks for online appointments will be maintained to enable members of the public to make early appointments to visit the Licensing Offices.

Members of the public without prior booking may submit applications by post or online, or via the drop-in boxes placed at the Licensing Offices from 9am to 5pm from Monday to Friday. Those submitting an application by post or via drop-in box should put the completed application form, all necessary documents and the appropriate fee (by crossed cheque payable to either "The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" or "The Government of the HKSAR") into an envelope. Original identity documents and cash must not be sent by post or drop-in box.

The TD appeals to members of the public in need to use the online appointment services as far as possible. For applications submitted via the drop-in boxes, members of the public are advised to mark on the envelope the vehicle registration marks and the expiry dates of the vehicle licences, and to leave contact telephone numbers on the application forms. This is to enable the staff to identify and follow up on urgent applications. Moreover, for timely processing of applications, members of the public should ensure that the respective application form is duly completed and all necessary supporting documents and a crossed cheque with the correct amount of payable fee are attached before submission. To avoid unnecessary delays, members of the public should submit applications two to three weeks before the expiry dates as far as practicable.

(2) The Public Vehicles Unit at Admiralty will suspend walk-in counter services. Members of the public can submit their applications for public vehicle licences using the drop-in box placed at the Hong Kong Licensing Office at Admiralty. The TD will process the applications according to established procedures and deliver the respective licences/permits/approval letters to the applicants upon completion of processing such applications.

(3) The Vehicle Records Office, the Driving Licence Records Office and the Driving Offence Points Office at Admiralty will suspend walk-in counter services. Those with enquiries relating to the collection of a driving licence after a disqualification period should call the Driving Licence Records Office or the Driving Offence Points Office.

(4) The Cross Boundary Unit at Sheung Wan will suspend walk-in counter services. Members of the public can submit their applications using the drop-in box placed at the Cross Boundary Unit. The TD will contact individual applicants to follow up on the applications.

In view of public health considerations, members of the public entering the TD's Licensing Offices have to undergo on-the-spot body temperature checks arranged by the TD. Any member of the public whose body temperature is higher than 37.5 degree Celsius or who refuses to undergo a body temperature check will be denied entry into the Licensing Offices. The offices will also strictly request members of the public to clean their hands with alcohol-based sanitiser before entering the Licensing Offices and wear surgical masks at all times in the offices. To reduce the risk of the spread of virus, the Licensing Offices will also strengthen the cleaning of public facilities and implement crowd control measures.

Driving test services

The Licensing Offices and the Driving Test Appointment Office will suspend walk-in counter services (including driving test applications) from July 20. Applicants for non-commercial driving tests may submit their applications using the drop-in boxes placed at the Hong Kong Licensing Office or the Kowloon Licensing Office, or by post to the Hong Kong Licensing Office or the Kowloon Licensing Office. Non-fresh applicants may also submit their applications online according to the current arrangement. As for the commercial driving tests, applicants may submit their applications online or by post to the Sha Tin Licensing Office according to the current arrangement. Applicants submitting an application by post or via drop-in box should put the completed application form, all necessary documents and the appropriate fee by crossed cheque (payable to either "The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" or "The Government of the HKSAR") into an envelope. Original identity documents and cash must not be sent by post or via drop-in box.

Driving test services (written test and road test) will continue as normal. In regard to anti-epidemic measures to reduce the risk of the spread of the virus, all candidates participating in driving tests must wear surgical masks inside the test centres and throughout the test, clean their hands with alcohol sanitisers before entering the centre, and undergo body temperature screening arranged by the TD. If a candidate does not wear a surgical mask, refuses to undergo a body temperature screening, or whose body temperature is higher than 37.5 degree Celsius, the candidate will not be allowed to enter the test venue and the test will be rescheduled. The Driving Examiners of the TD will open the vehicle windows during the road test to ensure good air circulation inside the vehicle compartment.

The TD appeals to candidates not to attend a driving test if they are unwell, and advises that they should consult a doctor promptly. For applicants who are absent from a driving test on medical grounds, they may submit their postponement applications with the original sick leave certificate/medical certificate to the Driving Test Appointment Office of the

TD within one month from the test date for the rescheduling of the test date.

Candidates applying for a postponement/temporary cancellation of a driving test appointment or change of driving test region may submit the original of the signed application letter, a copy of identification document and the original driving test appointment letter via the drop-in box placed at the Kowloon Licensing Office or by post to the Driving Test Appointment Office (Address: Transport Department, 2/F, Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices, 303 Cheung Sha Wan Road, Kowloon).

Vehicle examination services

The TD's Vehicle Examination Centres will provide vehicle examination services for vehicles with an appointment from Monday to Friday.

The TD will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic, align with the Government's anti-epidemic measures and arrangements, and will notify the public in due course. For enquiries, members of the public can contact the relevant offices at the following numbers:

Hong Kong Licensing Office	2804 2636
Kowloon Licensing Office	2150 7728
Kwun Tong Licensing Office	2775 6835
Sha Tin Licensing Office	2606 1468
Public Vehicles Unit	2804 2574
Vehicle Records Office	2867 4691
Driving Licence Records Office	2804 2596
Driving Offence Points Office	2804 2594
Cross Boundary Unit	2543 2114
Driving Test Centre/Driving Test Appointment Office	2771 7723
To Kwa Wan Vehicle Examination Centre	2364 7211/2333 3112
Sheung Kwai Chung Vehicle Examination Centre	2424 5215
Kowloon Bay Vehicle Examination Centre	2759 7036
New Kowloon Bay Vehicle Examination Centre	2751 8862