

CHP investigates 19 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has announced that as of 4pm today (July 15), the CHP was investigating 19 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 1 589 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 1 588 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases announced today involve eight males and 11 females aged between 17 and 75 years. Among them, five had travel history during the incubation period.

As for the local cases, the CHP will distribute deep throat saliva specimen bottles to residents of buildings where the patients live, as well as to those with whom they might have had contact during the infectious period. However, as there are recently a large number of confirmed cases, the relevant testing capacity remained limited even though the DH has earlier procured testing services directly from local private laboratories to enhance public testing capacity. Hence, the CHP will, based on risk assessment, accord priority to people with higher risk (for example, those who live in buildings with more than one unit with confirmed cases of unknown source) when distributing specimen bottles for testing. People are also urged to seek medical attention early even if mild symptoms develop to help prevent the spread of the disease in the community.

In view of the severe epidemic situation, the CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. As a number of recent cases involve elderly people, the CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with every day tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in

crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use. After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
 - Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
 - Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
 - Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
 - After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
 - Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
 - Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
 - When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.
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Subsidy scheme for vehicle maintenance workshops under Anti-epidemic Fund opens for applications

The Government today (July 15) announced that the subsidy scheme for vehicle maintenance workshops (VMWs) under the Anti-epidemic Fund is open for applications from tomorrow (July 16) until August 14. A one-off non-accountable subsidy of \$50,000 will be granted to each eligible VMW for assisting them in coping with the operating pressure under the COVID-19 epidemic. The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) expects the first round of subsidy payment will be made at the end of July at the earliest.

To ensure the applications can be processed efficiently, only electronic applications will be accepted. Persons in charge of eligible VMWs may download the EMSD's mobile app "E&M Trade App" from Google Play or the Apple App Store for free and submit their applications through the app. They may also apply through the EMSD website.

Application details are available on the EMSD webpage (www.emsd.gov.hk/en/supporting_government_initiatives/registration_scheme_for_vehicle_maintenance/aefss_vmw/index.html). For enquiries, please send emails to vm_aef@emsd.gov.hk or call 3968 7641.

LegCo meeting to continue tomorrow

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

As the business on the agenda of the Legislative Council (LegCo) meeting cannot be finished today (July 15), the President of LegCo has, in accordance with Rule 14(4) of the Rules of Procedure, decided that the Council meeting will resume tomorrow (July 16) at 9am.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (July 15), 12 COVID-19 confirmed patients (case numbers: 1127, 1207, 1238, 1242, 1245, 1246, 1259, 1261, 1273, 1277, 1379 and 1380) were discharged from hospital in the past 24 hours. So far, a total of 1,241 patients with confirmed or probable infection have been discharged.

At present, there are 639 negative pressure rooms in public hospitals with 1,186 negative pressure beds activated. A total of 314 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in 13 hospitals, among which seven patients are in critical condition (case numbers: 595, 1315, 1338, 1346, 1401, 1428 and 1450), nine are in serious condition (case numbers: 1269, 1322, 1365, 1439, 1443, 1463, 1470, 1472 and 1562) and the remaining 298 patients are in stable condition. A 90-year-old female patient (case number: 1350) passed away this afternoon. Including this case, nine COVID-19 patients have passed away in public hospitals so far.

In view of the latest COVID-19 situation and expert views, admission screening in public hospitals will be further extended today to cover particular high-risk groups, such as residents living in Tsz Wan Shan, workers of food premises and taxi drivers. Screening for inpatients will also be enhanced. Besides patients with influenza and pneumonia symptoms, patients with new loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath, and gastrointestinal symptoms during their stay in hospitals will be arranged for COVID-19 testing.

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.

Government welcomes passage of Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Profits Tax Concessions for Insurance-related Businesses) Bill 2019

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, welcomed the passage of the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Profits Tax

Concessions for Insurance-related Businesses) Bill 2019 by the Legislative Council today (July 15).

The Ordinance seeks to amend the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112) to reduce the profits tax rate by 50 per cent (i.e. 8.25 per cent) for all general reinsurance business of direct insurers, selected general insurance business of direct insurers and selected insurance brokerage business.

Mr Hui said that the new Ordinance would promote the development of the marine and specialty risk insurance businesses of Hong Kong and enhance the development of high value-added maritime services. The new Ordinance would also assist the insurance industry to seize new opportunities, including those arising from the Belt and Road Initiative.

Going forward, the Government and the Insurance Authority will proceed with the next stage of preparatory work, including formulation of implementation details and drafting of subsidiary legislation. The target is to give effect to the aforementioned tax concessions by the end of 2020 or early 2021.