

## LCQ15: Distance Business Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Mok and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, in the Legislative Council today (June 3):

Question:

To support enterprises to continue their businesses and provide services during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the Government has allocated a funding of \$500 million from the Anti-epidemic Fund for launching a Distance Business Programme (the Programme), under which funding support will be granted through a fast-track approval process for enterprises to adopt information technology (IT) solutions for developing distance business. The Programme covers 12 IT solution categories relating to distance business (e.g. online business, online order taking and delivery, and smart self-service systems) and opens for applications between May 18 and October 31 this year. In addition, the Government has published an IT Service Providers Reference List (the List) for reference by applicant enterprises. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective to-date numbers of applications received, approved and rejected; a breakdown of the number of enterprises whose applications were approved by (i) the number of employees and (ii) the number of years of operation, the respective numbers of applications received and approved under each IT solution category, as well as a breakdown of the rejected cases (if any) by reason for the rejection; whether it has assessed if the funding is sufficient to provide support for all eligible applicants; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, whether it will provide additional funding in a timely manner;
- (2) of the respective to-date numbers of applications for inclusion in the List received, approved and rejected; a breakdown of the number of service providers whose applications were approved by (i) the number of employees and (ii) the number of years of operation, as well as a breakdown of the rejected cases (if any) by reason for the rejection;
- (3) of the details of the publicity efforts made for the Programme, including the means (e.g. holding briefing sessions or placing advertisements on mainstream or online media), number of times, number of participants and expenditure; and
- (4) whether it has received complaints that websites with a domain name comprising ''D-Biz'' (the English abbreviation of the Programme) were found to have disguised as the official website or have misled the public; if so, of the details and the follow-up actions?

Reply:

President,

Remote working or service has become a new trend against the backdrop of the epidemic. The Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) has launched the Distance Business Programme (the Programme) under the Anti-epidemic Fund to provide funding support to enterprises to continue their business and services during the epidemic through adoption of information technology (IT) solutions. The Hong Kong Productivity Council is the Secretariat of the Programme (the Secretariat).

The reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Programme has invited applications from IT service providers to enrol on the IT Service Providers Reference List (Reference List) from May 4. As at 6pm on June 1, the Secretariat has received 3 525 applications. A total of 2 023 IT service providers have been enrolled on the Reference List. Remaining applications are being processed, and no service provider has been rejected from enrolling on the Reference List so far. The Secretariat does not maintain statistics of the years of operation of the service providers on the Reference List, while the number of service providers by a breakdown of their number of employees is tabulated below:

Number of employees	Number of IT service providers on the Reference List
1-9	1 391
10-19	312
20-29	103
30-39	60
40-49	28
50-99	62
100 or above	67
Total	2 023

The Programme has invited funding applications from enterprises from May 18. As at 6pm on June 1, the Secretariat has received 8 665 applications. The Secretariat is processing the applications received, and has yet to approve or reject any funding applications.

(3) ITC issued a press release on May 1, 2020 to announce the details for IT service providers to apply for enrolling on the Reference List, and subsequently issued another press release on May 16 to announce the details for funding applications by enterprises. It also issued a press release on May 30 to remind service providers who wish to enrol on the Reference List to submit applications before the deadline as soon as possible. The Programme has a dedicated webpage with information including the Reference List, Guidance Notes and application forms. In addition, the Secretariat has organised or participated in over 16 webinars with over 15 000 participants

from April 24 to June 1, and has published/broadcasted advertisements on mainstream or online media for over 170 times during the period to promote the Programme. As at June 1, the Secretariat has spent \$270,000 on promoting the Programme.

(4) ITC and the Secretariat have received enquiries and complaints on suspected bogus websites which resemble the official website of the Programme. The Secretariat has issued clarifications on the official website of the Programme and reminded the public to stay vigilant. It has also issued 17 written warnings to those suspected bogus website entities, and furnished information of those websites to the Police for follow-up.

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## Applications for new niches at Tsang Tsui and Wo Hop Shek columbaria to close on June 10

Applications for some 40 000 new extendable niches at Tsang Tsui Columbarium in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase VI in Fanling will close on June 10. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (June 3) reminded those who wish to apply for the niches to submit their applications as soon as possible.

An FEHD spokesman said that applications for the niches in this exercise started on May 11 and will close on June 10. Late applications will not be accepted.

The FEHD will allocate a total of 44 950 extendable public niches at Tsang Tsui Columbarium and Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase VI, including 22 680 standard niches (7 080 smoke-free niches and 15 600 non-smoke-free niches) and 220 non-smoke-free large niches at Tsang Tsui Columbarium, and 21 720 standard niches (11 490 smoke-free niches and 10 230 non-smoke-free niches) and 330 large niches (160 smoke-free niches and 170 non-smoke-free niches) at Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase VI.

Application forms can be collected at the department's Hong Kong or Kowloon Cemeteries and Crematoria Office, District Environmental Hygiene Offices, Home Affairs Enquiry Centres of the Home Affairs Department, Post Offices on Cheung Chau, Lamma Island, Peng Chau or at Mui Wo and Tai O, downloaded from the FEHD website, or obtained through the enquiry hotline 2841 9111 or by email ([apply\\_newniche@fehd.gov.hk](mailto:apply_newniche@fehd.gov.hk)).

The completed application forms together with the copies of required documents should be submitted on or before June 10 by fax (2333 1716), email ([apply\\_newniche@fehd.gov.hk](mailto:apply_newniche@fehd.gov.hk)), or in person to the FEHD Hong Kong or Kowloon

Cemeteries and Crematoria Office or by post to the above offices. The spokesman advises applicants to submit application forms online so as to avoid postal delays or non-delivery.

Information on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Offices and Public Niche Allocation Office of FEHD is as follows:

Hong Kong Cemeteries and Crematoria Office

Address: 1J Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley, Hong Kong

Tel: 2570 4318

Fax: 2591 1879

Kowloon Cemeteries and Crematoria Office

Address: Upper Ground Floor, 6 Cheong Hang Road, Hung Hom, Kowloon

Tel: 2365 5321

Fax: 2176 4963

Public Niche Allocation Office

Address: Upper Ground Floor, Block B, 6 Cheong Hang Road, Hung Hom, Kowloon

Tel: 2330 5635

Fax: 2333 1716

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## **Red flag hoisted at Hung Shing Yeh Beach**

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (June 3) that due to big waves, red flag has been hoisted at Hung Shing Yeh Beach in Islands District. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at the beach.

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## **Government announces latest disease prevention measures**

The Government today (June 2) announced the latest disease prevention

measures and arrangements under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599).

The situation of COVID-19 outbreak in Hong Kong and the number of confirmed cases have slightly stabilised in the past month or so, but remain very volatile, with local cluster cases reported again recently. At the same time, the global situation remains severe. As at June 1, 2020, 218 countries/territories/areas reported a total of around 5.98 million COVID-19 cases. Since late March, about 70 000 to 110 000 new cases have been reported daily around the world. On the other hand, despite significant improvement in the situation in the Mainland, individual provinces/regions continue to report some imported and local cases in the past few weeks.

The above situation reflects the fact that the pandemic is yet to be over whether in Hong Kong or places outside Hong Kong. Indeed, the World Health Organization and health experts advised that COVID-19 would not be eradicated without effective treatment and vaccination. Individual countries and regions need to keep adjusting the intensity of their infection control measures in light of the circumstances, taking into account their respective economic and social needs. The Government's priority at the moment is not to completely eliminate the virus or to achieve sustained zero infection level, but to incorporate disease prevention and control, as well as infection management, into the new normal of the daily operation of the society.

Specifically, the Government will continue to adopt the "suppress and lift" strategy, and maintain the relevant disease prevention measures when the epidemic continues, including immigration control and social distancing measures. When drawing up the relevant measures, the Government has all along endeavoured to strike a balance among the factors of public health protection, economic impact and social acceptance, in order to maintain the aforementioned disease prevention measures while allowing room for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities of the society when situation permits. In parallel, to achieve the goals of early identification, early isolation and early treatment, the Government will enhance virus surveillance in the community in order to identify asymptomatic infected persons as soon as possible to break the invisible transmission chain at an early stage.

#### Social distancing measures

In view of the above development of the epidemic and the strategy in combatting the disease, there is a need to continue to maintain the relevant legal framework in the upcoming period to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community through various social distancing measures. For this purpose, the Government has gazetted today the amendments and directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) as follows:

(1) The expiry dates of Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G will be extended by around two months to August 31, 2020.

## Catering premises and scheduled premises

(2) The existing regulations and restrictions on catering premises and scheduled premises will be maintained, with refinements made having regard to circumstances on the ground (see Annex). Amongst others, activities and facilities involving higher health risks such as live performance, dancing activities, steam and sauna facilities, etc. will continue to be suspended or prohibited.

## Group Gatherings

(3) Unless exempted, group gatherings at public places will continue to be prohibited.

The latest directions under Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G will be effective from 0.00am on June 5, 2020 for a period of 14 days till June 18, 2020.

A spokesperson said, "The Government will review the various measures in place from time to time in accordance with the development of the epidemic situation, and will make suitable adjustments taking into account all relevant factors."

## Immigration control measures

In addition to social distancing measures in the community, there is a need to continue restrictions of movement of people between Hong Kong and other places and implement compulsory quarantine measures to prevent imported cases. In the meantime, the Government holds the view that there is a need to introduce a mechanism to allow consideration of gradual relaxation of compulsory quarantine requirements for persons arriving from specific countries and places after assessing the relevant public health risks.

To this end, the Government has gazetted amendments to the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) today. The amendments will be effective from 0.00am on June 5, 2020 with details as follows:

(1) A mechanism will be introduced to empower the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) to specify two categories of places. For persons arriving from these categories of places:

- (a) For Category 1 specified places, those persons will be subject to compulsory quarantine arrangements; or
- (b) For Category 2 specified places, those persons will be excluded from the requirements in respect of the compulsory quarantine arrangements subject to meeting certain conditions (such as obtaining a negative COVID-19 test result).

The above arrangements pertaining to Category 1 and 2 places are applicable to both places within and outside China. At this stage, SFH has, in accordance with Cap. 599C and Cap. 599E, published a notice in the gazette

today to specify all places in China outside Hong Kong and all places outside China as Category 1 specified places with effect from 0.00am on June 5, 2020. That is, unless exempted pursuant to the regulations, arrivals from these places will be subject to the compulsory quarantine arrangements.

(2) The criteria for the Chief Secretary for Administration to exempt travellers from the compulsory quarantine arrangements under Cap. 599E will be expanded to cover persons whose travelling is necessary for purposes relating to manufacturing operations, business activities or the provision of professional services in the interest of Hong Kong's economic development, and thus be aligned with relevant provisions under Cap. 599C.

(3) Taking into account the need to continue to restrict movement of people between Hong Kong and other places and implement compulsory quarantine measures in the upcoming period, as well as development of the epidemic situation in places within and outside China, the Government will extend the expiry date of Cap. 599C by a month to July 7, 2020 and that of Cap. 599E by three months to September 18, 2020.

The spokesperson said, "The current amendments mainly serve to provide a statutory basis on which the Government may make, based on latest developments, assessment on the latest public health risks of relevant countries and regions, and in turn determine their category of specified places as the epidemic situation changes locally and overseas. The relevant mechanism provides us the flexibility to discuss immigration control measures other than compulsory quarantine with relevant regions subject to their public health risks, thus encouraging gradual resumption of movement of people and thereby spurring related economic activities. We have all along maintained close communication with relevant Mainland and Macao authorities on this front under the framework of joint prevention and control. We will announce the relevant details as soon as possible should there be new arrangements."

The above amendments to the four regulations are made in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599). Section 8 of Cap. 599 empowers the Chief Executive in Council to make public health emergency regulations for the purposes of preventing, combating or alleviating the effects of a public health emergency and protecting public health.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and the managers of scheduled premises that contravene the statutory requirements under Cap. 599F would have committed a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Separately, any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of such gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such gathering, commits an offence under Cap. 599G. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months. Persons who participate in a prohibited group gathering may discharge liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty of \$2,000.

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## CHP investigates six additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has announced that as of 4pm today (June 2), the CHP was investigating six additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 1 094 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 1 093 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases announced today involve five females and one male aged between 15 and 78. Among them, four reside in Luk Chuen House, Lek Yuen Estate, Sha Tin, and one had a travel history during the incubation period. 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.

Given the emergence of confirmed cases residing in Luk Chuen House in the past few days, the Government expert group inspected the building last night to follow up on the matter.

According to the initial inspection findings by members of the Government expert group, including members from the CHP; Under Secretary for the Environment, Mr Tse Chin-wan; and Chair of Infectious Diseases, Department of Microbiology, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong, Professor Yuen Kwok-yung, the emergence of the cases were not due to pipe issues of the units concerned. Hence, no evacuation of the residents of the block is required. Separately, the CHP took eight environmental samples from the washrooms of the units of the additional confirmed cases as a precautionary measure and all were negative. The members also considered that the touching of common facilities, such as letterbox, lift and entrance gate may have caused the transmission or cross infection. The CHP strongly urges the public, especially the residents concerned, to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene.

The CHP again urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives to minimise the risk of infection. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

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 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](http://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](https://wa.me/85296171823?text=hi), they will be able to get 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.