

## **Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases**

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (May 20), one COVID-19 confirmed patient (case number: 1 040) was discharged from hospital in the past 24 hours. So far, a total of 1 026 confirmed and suspected patients have been discharged.

At present, there are 659 negative pressure rooms in public hospitals with 1,219 negative pressure beds activated. A total of 26 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in nine hospitals, among which one patient is in critical condition (case number: 595), one patient is in serious condition (case number: 1 049), and the remaining 24 patients are in stable condition.

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.

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## **Missing man in Sham Shui Po located**

A man who went missing in Sham Shui Po has been located.

Lee Kwong, aged 89, went missing after he left an elderly home on Yee Kuk Street on March 11 morning. Staff of the elderly home made a report to Police on March 12.

The man was located inside a hospital on Wing Hong Street today (May 20). He sustained no injuries and no suspicious circumstances were detected.

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## **Money service operator convicted of operating without licence**

An information technology (IT) company and its director were convicted of operating a money service without a valid licence. The IT company was fined \$25,000 earlier and the director was sentenced to two months imprisonment suspended for 12 months and fined \$25,000 today (May 20) at Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts.

Acting on information, officers of the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) earlier conducted an investigation and discovered an IT company located in Wan Chai and its director had operated a money service without a licence.

Under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Ordinance, a person who wishes to operate a remittance and/or money changing service is required to apply for a licence from the C&ED. Any person who operates a money service without a valid licence commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Members of the public may report any suspected unlicensed money service operations to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account ([crimereport@customs.gov.hk](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)).

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## SCED speaks on RTHK

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, on the Communications Authority (CA)'s decision regarding complaints against the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) TV programme "Headliner" at a media session at the Legislative Council building today (May 20):

Reporter: ... (inaudible) on the incident of the "Headliner" as well as your comments, do you think that has done more good than harm to the freedom of speech in Hong Kong, and even to the operation of RTHK now?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: First of all, freedom of speech has always been protected under the Basic Law for all broadcasting operators, of course, including RTHK. But RTHK is also a public broadcaster which needs to fulfil its obligations, particularly those stipulated under the Charter of RTHK. Among the obligations, RTHK is under the arrangement that its programmes will be subject to the Communications Authority's jurisdiction regarding the handling of complaints against them. The Communications Authority is a statutory, independent body which applies the same rule on all public and private broadcasters in Hong Kong. When they receive a complaint, they will handle it in a fair manner. I believe in recent cases where the CA passed the verdicts against RTHK, dual recognition had been given to the entire process, and in the process, RTHK was allowed to make representation. So I think there would be a fair treatment to all the complaints. But I would also urge RTHK to take the matter seriously, and to review whether there are scope for improvement on its management and governance, and also in full compliance of the Charter of RTHK.

Reporter: ... (inaudible) meeting with RTHK's Board of Advisors, what matters

are you going to discuss in the meeting?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: I am accepting the request by the Board of Advisors, set up under the RTHK Charter, to meet with them. The Board of Advisors has a unique role under the Charter, because it is specifically set up to offer advice to RTHK, in particular on editorial principles, and also the standards and quality of programming. These are areas that the Board of Advisors could offer valuable advice to RTHK, and ensure that they fulfil the stipulations in the Charter. I'm happy to see them tomorrow and to hear from them about their views, perhaps in the light of the recent incidents regarding RTHK.

Reporter: ... (inaudible) may have concerns that this ruling will have chilling effects on satirical shows like other programmes... (inaudible)

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: I think the verdict of the Communications Authority on RTHK's programme is a fair and impartial judgement. We shouldn't be looking at it from any angles other than giving a fair comment on the incident itself. As I reiterated time and again, the CA's verdict applies not just to RTHK, but all broadcasters in Hong Kong, because they do this in accordance with the law, and also within their power. And RTHK, under its Charter, also submits itself to the surveillance of the CA in this regard. The process also respects natural justice, whereby complaints are being looked into and the complainants and also the subject of the complaint are given a chance to make representations. So after the due process is finished, I think people should look at it in a fair manner. Thank you.

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

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## **LCQ5: Impacts of discarded face masks on the environment and ecology**

Following is a question by the Hon Chung Kwok-pan and a reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam Sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

To prevent infection of the Coronavirus Disease 2019, healthcare personnel and members of the public need to always wear face masks. Some environmentalists have pointed out that a large number of face masks are disposed of improperly every day, giving rise to not only risks of virus spreading but also pollution to the environment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Environment Bureau (ENB) has compiled statistics on or estimated the accumulated and average quantities of face masks disposed of each day across the territory since the outbreak of the epidemic;

(2) as some environmentalists have pointed out that anti-virus N95 masks and surgical masks generally contain degradation-resistant materials, and currently a large number of face masks are discarded along with domestic waste in landfills every day, whether the ENB has assessed the impacts of such a situation on the environment and ecology; and

(3) of the measures adopted by the ENB for handling the pollution to the environment and ecology caused by discarded face masks?

Reply:

President,

It is difficult for us to accurately provide the statistics on how many face masks have been used by Hong Kong's people since the outbreak of the epidemic. However, with an estimated population of about 7.5 million and a labour force of about 4 million in Hong Kong, the amount of disposable face masks used daily could be in the order of millions.

Based on the estimation that around 4 to 6 million face masks are used in Hong Kong daily and each face mask weighs about 2 to 3 grams, the face masks disposed of at landfills every day will weigh some 10 to 15 tonnes. According to the report on Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong – Waste Statistics for 2018, the amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) disposed of at landfills was 11 400 tonnes per day (tpd). On this basis, it is estimated that disposable face masks discarded during the epidemic will account for about 0.1 per cent of the MSW disposed of at landfills.

Disposable face masks are mainly made of plastic materials, such as non-woven fabrics, filter layers and elastic strings etc., and waste plastics is the third largest constituent of MSW in Hong Kong. According to the 2018 report mentioned above, the amount of waste plastics disposed of at landfills was about 2 300 tpd. On this basis, it is estimated that disposable face masks discarded during the epidemic will account for about 0.5 per cent of the waste plastics disposed of.

Since disposable face masks, including N95 masks and surgical masks, are made of composite materials of different kinds and metals which are difficult to be separated, they are not suitable for recycling or discarding in recycling bins to avoid contaminating other recyclables. In addition, the Government announced on May 5 that it would distribute reusable masks to citizens of Hong Kong. This can help reduce the use of disposable face masks.

At present, discarded face masks from hospitals and isolation centres handling suspected and confirmed cases will be disposed of as clinical waste by delivering to the Chemical Waste Treatment Centre for incineration at a high temperature of about 1 000 degrees Celsius. All the emissions will be treated by advanced air pollution control equipment to ensure compliance with

the stringent emission standards to protect the environment.

As for the face masks used by the general public, they will be mainly collected along with the domestic waste by the refuse collection vehicles and sent to landfills directly or through refuse transfer stations. In the transfer stations, the waste will be conveyed to the purposely-built seal-tight containers via automated conveyor system, and then transported by sea or road to the landfills for disposal. The process of waste handling at the transfer stations is mainly operated by machinery, and the staff at the stations do not need to contact or handle the waste with their hands. The contractors of the transfer stations will regularly clean the waste tipping hall, the floor, the waste conveyor system, and the waste containers and trucks to keep the place clean and hygienic. Wastewater generated from the transfer stations will be properly treated before discharging into the public sewers, and subsequently transported to the government sewage treatment works for further treatment.

The landfill is designed and constructed as an enclosed containment incorporating multilayer composite liner system covering the entire area of the site, and leachate will be collected and properly treated. At the end of the daily operation, the contractor will cover the tipping areas with a layer of approximately 150 mm of soil and cement-based cover material to ensure environmental hygiene and prevent the emission of odour. In addition, the biogas produced in the landfill will be collected by the gas collection system for better use – the generation of energy. Under the enclosed environment in the landfill, the domestic waste will decompose and undergo anaerobic digestion. Thermal energy will be generated during the process and the temperature in the landfill will be increased, which will help kill pathogens, including bacteria and viruses. *E. coli* is often used as a microbial indicator of pathogens. The lower its level, the less likely the pathogens would be present in the environment. We have taken leachate from landfills for testing of *E. coli*, and the test result showed that there is no *E. coli* in the leachate. Therefore, the disposal of face masks in landfills would not result in the spreading of diseases.

During the epidemic, relevant departments will step up their efforts in cleaning up discarded face masks and refuse, and remind their staff to stay vigilant, observe good personal hygiene and dispose of refuse properly. As many members of the public visit country parks in recent days, relevant departments, including the Environmental Protection Department and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), have stepped up inspections and cleaning of venues. At the same time, the AFCD has also publicised through different channels, including hanging publicity banners and posting posters in country parks with high visitor flow to urge the visitors to maintain environmental hygiene and protect the ecosystem. AFCD staff will also remind hikers to take their litter home when patrolling the country trails. If littering is found, appropriate enforcement actions will be taken.

In response to the novel coronavirus outbreak, the Government has been constantly reminding members of the public to fight the virus together in the past few months through various channels to maintain strict personal hygiene

and appropriate social distance with others at all times, and make proper use of personal protective equipment (such as face masks). Used personal protective equipment should be properly discarded in lidded rubbish bins and must not be littered elsewhere to avoid causing health risk and adversely affecting the ecosystem.

Thank you, President.