

## LCQ6: Quarantine facilities

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

While the Government has been searching for suitable premises for use as temporary quarantine facilities since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic in Hong Kong, it has encountered much difficulty. On the other hand, among the camps operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), only Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp was earlier on used as a temporary quarantine facility. Regarding the provision of quarantine facilities, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of quarantine residential places provided by the previous and current quarantine facilities;
- (2) whether, since the current outbreak of the epidemic, the Government has discussed with the various NGOs the borrowing of the camps operated by them for use as temporary quarantine facilities; if so, of the details (including the party initiating the discussions); if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether, before the onset of the current outbreak of the epidemic, it had drawn up a standing list of the properties of the Government and NGOs which were suitable for use as temporary quarantine facilities, so that sufficient quarantine facilities might be provided expeditiously when there was an outbreak of an epidemic; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) is an unprecedented virus which is highly contagious and fast-spreading, and the outbreak situation is evolving rapidly. To cope with the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government has been adopting a strategy of "containment" with specific measures to achieve the purposes of early identification, early isolation and early treatment as well as a suite of measures to reduce population mobility and in-population social contacts. Apart from admitting patients confirmed or suspected to be infected to hospitals for isolation and treatment, putting close contacts who may have been exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19 (including close contacts of confirmed patients) under compulsory quarantine at quarantine centres is also a crucial element of the anti-epidemic work.

With a view to effectively responding to novel infectious diseases including COVID-19, the Government has formulated the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance,

which clearly set out the investigation and control measures under different response levels. The Department of Health would get prepared in collaboration with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to transform suitable holiday camps into quarantine centres as and when necessary.

The rapid development of the outbreak in Hong Kong and around the world since the end of January this year has led to a surge in demand on quarantine facilities, including successive occurrence of local infection cases, surge in imported cases, increasing proportion of close contact persons among confirmed cases, the need to bring back Hong Kong residents who were stranded in Hubei Province and those on the Diamond Princess cruise, as well as the immediate evacuation for the purpose of disease investigation of infection cases, etc. In this connection and since the suitable holiday camps could only provide limited number of quarantine units, there has been a pressing need for the Government to provide a large number of quarantine facilities within a short period of time, and the Government has been looking for suitable sites in full steam since late January.

When searching for sites for setting up quarantine facilities, an inter-departmental team would conduct assessment on every possible site to thoroughly examine whether the location and facilities of the sites meet the requirements for use as quarantine centres. Among others, it is crucial for the facilities to be ready for use within an extremely short period of time. As such, priority would go to premises under the ownership and management of the Government when considering suitable sites. Indeed, we are very grateful to the suggestions offered by different sectors of the society and non-governmental organisations on possible sites for use as quarantine centres over the period, and have rented individual sites deemed suitable for such use after consideration. Nevertheless, suitable sites meeting the aforesaid requirements are limited.

As at May 19, the Government has set up quarantine centres at the following sites:

- (1) Lady MacLehose Holiday Village, providing 45 units;
- (2) Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp, providing 25 units;
- (3) Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village in Chai Wan (including the constructed units at basketball court and football field), providing 379 units;
- (4) Heritage Lodge of Jao Tsung-I Academy, providing 53 units;
- (5) Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre in Pat Heung, providing 208 units; and
- (6) Chun Yeung Estate, providing 3 121 units.

Among the above, two smaller quarantine facilities, namely the Lady MacLehose Holiday Village and the Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp were no longer used for housing close contacts since early March, to achieve better manpower deployment and utilisation of facilities.

In light of the rapid and volatile development of COVID-19, it is difficult to accurately predict the demand on quarantine facilities. Therefore, we must plan ahead and continue to increase provision of

quarantine facilities as far as possible. The Government has also been setting up additional quarantine facilities through construction works at other sites. Construction works of providing 99 quarantine units at the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre has been completed. As to the government site at Penny's Bay, it is expected that the works would be completed by July, providing some 800 units. In addition, the Government will also construct quarantine units at the site reserved for future tourism development at Penny's Bay and is making preparations to kick start the works concerned. According to preliminary estimation, additional 700 units could be provided by September.

Thanks to the concerted effort and support across different parties in the community, the Government has been able to increase thousands of quarantine units within a short period of time. In the long run, we consider it necessary to set up permanent quarantine facilities in Hong Kong in preparation for any possible outbreaks of disease in the future. We would review the overall situation after the current outbreak and assess the long term quarantine needs of Hong Kong, in order to make early preparations for other possible outbreaks of disease.

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## US Dollar Liquidity Facility tender result

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

US Dollar Liquidity Facility tender result:

Tender date	: May 20, 2020 (Wednesday)
Settlement date	: May 21, 2020 (Thursday)
Repayment date	: May 28, 2020 (Thursday)
Tenor	: 7 days
Amount applied	: US\$200 million
Amount allotted	: US\$200 million
Lowest interest rate accepted	: 0.35 per cent
Highest interest rate accepted	: 0.35 per cent

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# Amendments to Dangerous Drugs Ordinance and Control of Chemicals Ordinance to be gazetted on May 22

A spokesperson for the Security Bureau said today (May 20) that the Government will publish the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2020 (DDO Order) and the Control of Chemicals Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 2) Order 2020 (CCO Order) in the Gazette this Friday (May 22).

The two Orders will respectively add methoxyacetylfentanyl, FUB-AMB, ADB-FUBINACA, CUMYL-4CN-BINACA and ADB-CHMINACA to the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (DDO) (Cap. 134), and APAA, PMK glycidate and PMK glycidic acid to Schedule 2 to the Control of Chemicals Ordinance (CCO) (Cap. 145).

The spokesperson said, "The amendments aim to deter the trafficking and abuse of these dangerous drugs and substances. This will help to fortify Hong Kong's defence in the fight against drugs."

The spokesperson added, "Methoxyacetylfentanyl is a synthetic analogue of fentanyl. Similar to other opioids, overdose of methoxyacetylfentanyl can lead to respiratory arrest and death. FUB-AMB, ADB-FUBINACA, CUMYL-4CN-BINACA are potent synthetic cannabinoids which affect the central nervous system, and can result in severe reactions including death. ADB-CHMINACA is one of the most potent synthetic cannabinoids studied to date, of which the efficacy and potency are substantially greater than those of tetrahydrocannabinol. Signs and symptoms resulting from the abuse of ADB-CHMINACA include tachycardia, unresponsiveness, agitation, combativeness, seizures, hyperemesis, slurred speech, delirium and sudden death.

"The DDO Order will bring the above five substances into the same strict control as other dangerous drugs under the DDO. Those prosecuted of trafficking and illicit manufacture of these substances will be liable to a maximum penalty of a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment. Possession and consumption of the substances in contravention of the DDO will also constitute criminal offences.

"Meanwhile, APAA is an immediate precursor of 1-phenyl-2-propanone, a substance used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine and methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice"), which are dangerous drugs controlled under the DDO. PMK glycidate and PMK glycidic acid are both precursors of 3,4-methylenedioxy-phenyl-2-propanone, a substance used in the illicit manufacture of MDMA, also a dangerous drug controlled under the DDO, and related substances. Both 1-phenyl-2-propanone and 3,4-methylenedioxy-phenyl-2-propanone are already controlled precursor chemicals included in Schedule 2 to the CCO. Taking into consideration the harms that the dangerous drugs manufactured from APAA, PMK glycidate and PMK glycidic acid may cause

to abusers, we propose to place the three substances under legislative control.

"The CCO Order will bring APAA, PMK glycidate and PMK glycidic acid under the control of the CCO. It will be an offence to possess, manufacture, transport or distribute these substances for the unlawful production of dangerous drugs, or import or export these substances not under and in accordance with a licence issued by the Customs and Excise Department. The maximum penalty will be a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for 15 years."

The spokesperson said that the Government had consulted the Action Committee Against Narcotics and it supported the proposed amendments. The Government had also sought the views of the Panel on Security of the Legislative Council and the relevant trades and stakeholders. There was no adverse comment.

The two Orders will be tabled at the Legislative Council on May 27, 2020, and are expected to become effective on July 24, 2020.

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## **LCQ13: Concentration of ozone in air**

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

For several consecutive days in April this year, the Air Quality Health Indexes recorded by the general and roadside air quality monitoring stations in various districts reached 8 or above (i.e. "Very High" or "Serious" health risk), with the 1-hour concentrations of ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) in some districts even exceeding 200µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Under the prevailing Air Quality Objectives (AQOs), the 8-hour average concentration limit of O<sub>3</sub> in air is 160µg/m<sup>3</sup>, which is less stringent than that of 100µg/m<sup>3</sup> as recommended by the World Health Organization. However, in the latest review of AQOs, the Government did not propose to tighten the AQO for O<sub>3</sub> on the grounds that the regional background O<sub>3</sub> level was relatively high and the various emission reduction measures would further reduce the emission of nitric oxide in the urban areas, thereby reducing the consumption of O<sub>3</sub> in the urban areas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures in place at the present stage to lower the background O<sub>3</sub> level in Hong Kong, and reduce the O<sub>3</sub> produced locally and O<sub>3</sub> which originated from the Mainland; the effectiveness of such measures; and

(2) as the authorities indicated at the end of 2019 that the Guangdong and Hong Kong sides had jointly launched in 2018 the Study on Post-2020 Regional

Air Pollutant Emission Reduction Targets and Concentration Levels, of the latest progress of the Study; whether it will formulate emission reduction targets for 03 precursors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1) The overall air quality in Hong Kong has shown a discernible improvement in recent years. According to the data recorded at the air quality monitoring stations of the Environmental Protection Department, the annual average concentrations of respirable suspended particles (PM<sub>10</sub>), fine suspended particles (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) in the ambient air and at roadside have dropped by about 30 per cent to 60 per cent between 2013 and 2019 (relevant data is set out in Annex 1). The above monitoring results reflect the effectiveness of the emission reduction measures implemented by the Government in recent years. However, the ozone concentration in the ambient air is still on a rise.

Ozone is a complicated air pollution issue as well as a regional issue. It is not directly emitted from pollution sources but formed by the photochemical reaction between nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of sunlight.

As Tap Mun air quality monitoring station is distant from the local emission sources, its monitoring results can reflect the regional background air pollution level. Between 2013 and 2019, the annual average concentration of ozone recorded at Tap Mun station increased from 75µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2013 to 80µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2019, with a rise of 7 per cent (relevant data is set out in Annex 2). During the same period, the average annual ozone concentrations recorded at the general and roadside monitoring stations increased respectively from 43µg/m<sup>3</sup> and 14µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2013 to 60µg/m<sup>3</sup> and 32µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2019, with a rise of 40 per cent and 129 per cent respectively.

Ozone can be scavenged by some pollutants (such as nitric oxide (NO)) in the ambient air via chemical reactions. The main reason for the higher rise of ozone concentrations in Hong Kong than the background level is attributed to the reduction in local NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from vehicles, resulting in less NO to react with and titrate ozone and hence more ozone remaining in the atmosphere and a larger increase in ozone concentrations measured. Nevertheless, since NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs are ozone precursors, reducing NO<sub>x</sub> emissions will not only reduce the local NO<sub>2</sub> levels but also help reduce the overall ozone levels and its exceedances in the region and Hong Kong in the long run.

The Environment Bureau has implemented a wide range of control measures focusing on local NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs emission sources in recent years, including phasing out some 80 000 pre-Euro IV diesel commercial vehicles; strengthening the control of emissions of liquefied petroleum gas and petrol vehicles; tightening the vehicle emission standards and progressively tightening the emission caps of power plants, etc. Meanwhile, Guangdong and Hong Kong have been strengthening collaboration, including launching a number of emission

reduction plans covering power plants, vehicles, vessels and industries under the framework of the Pearl River Delta Regional Air Quality Management Plan, to deal with regional air pollution. These measures to reduce NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs emissions will help improve the ozone problem in the region in the long run.

In addition to the above policies being implemented, the SAR Government will continue to launch a number of new measures in the short to medium term to further reduce the local NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC emissions, including reducing vehicle emissions, promoting the use of electric vehicles and tightening the control of emissions from power plants (as detailed in Annex 3).

(2) In order to continuously improve the regional air quality, the Hong Kong and Guangdong Governments established a science team in 2018 to jointly conduct a study on post-2020 regional air pollutant emission reduction targets and concentration levels. The two Governments held a meeting every six months to discuss the compilation of emission inventories of air pollutants, formulate practical air quality improvement measures beyond 2020 for the two places, and conduct air quality modelling to predict the achievable air quality levels in the region.

The study will formulate the emission reduction targets for five major air pollutants up to 2030, including SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub> and VOCs. Among these pollutants, NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs are ozone precursors, hence reducing their emissions will help alleviate the ozone pollution problem. The two Governments are now taking forward the work in accordance with the timetable of the study agreed by both parties. The results of the study are expected to be announced in 2022.

In addition, the Governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao will launch a three-year joint study from 2020 to 2023 on Characterization of photochemical ozone formation, regional and super-regional transportation in the Greater Bay Area, in order to better apprehend the origins of ozone precursors, the formation mechanism of ozone and characteristics of its regional and super-regional transportation in the Greater Bay Area. The Hong Kong and Guangdong Governments are also adding the real-time VOCs monitoring in the regional air quality monitoring network by stages. These studies and enhanced monitoring will strengthen the understanding of the formation mechanism and sources of ozone in the region, and help further devise policies to tackle ozone pollution.

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## **CSSA caseload for April 2020**

The overall Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload in April showed a rise of 4 819 cases, representing an increase of 2.2 per cent compared with that of March, according to the latest CSSA caseload statistics released by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) today (May 20).

The total CSSA caseload at the end of April stood at 227 510 (see attached table), with a total of 311 404 recipients.

Analysed by case nature, old age cases remained steady at 135 219 cases.

Unemployment cases rose by 24 per cent to 18 165 cases. Single parent cases increased by 2.4 per cent to 24 612 cases. Low-earnings cases increased by 2.2 per cent to 3 039 cases. Ill-health cases edged up by 1.8 per cent to 25 004 cases while permanent disability cases registered a slight increase of 0.5 per cent to 17 117 cases.