

Suspension of temporary test centre at AsiaWorld-Expo

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

In response to the large number of inbound travellers from Europe and the United States, the Hospital Authority (HA) had set up temporary test centres at AsiaWorld-Expo and North Lantau Hospital since March 20 to arrange tests for travellers with upper respiratory symptoms for early identification of the COVID-19 infection.

Starting from April 5, the test services have been consolidated at the test centre at AsiaWorld-Expo. With the declining number of inbound travellers, the test centre at AsiaWorld Expo will be suspended from noon tomorrow (April 19) to refocus manpower resources to hospital services.

The HA spokesperson said, "The HA Major Incident Control Centre will liaise closely with the Department of Health to arrange the transfer of inbound travellers with respiratory symptoms, people undergoing home quarantine or close contacts of confirmed cases to various Accident and Emergency Departments (A&E) for the tests required. They may need to wait at the A&E test and triage centres for the test results, which usually take several hours."

The HA thanked the teams of healthcare workers and supporting staff for setting up the test centres within a very tight timeline to implement the instructions of the Government's Steering Committee in relation to the COVID-19 virus. The appreciation was also extended to the participating colleagues from different hospital clusters who help run the service around the clock.

"The pre-hospital test service has played an important diversion role by largely reducing the number of suspected cases admitted to the hospitals for testing and alleviating the demand pressure for first-tier isolation beds. As of yesterday (April 17), of the over 1 400 specimens collected at the two test centres, about 100 confirmed cases were identified. The process of on-the-spot testing and the release of test results have saved a total of 1 300 admissions to the hospital, leaving more public hospital isolation facilities for confirmed cases."

Club-house Subsidy Scheme open for

application

The Club-house Subsidy Scheme (the Scheme) is now open for application, following the approval of the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council today (April 18). The Scheme provides a one-off subsidy of \$100,000 to eligible club-houses operating with a valid Certificate of Compliance (CoC) issued under the Clubs (Safety of Premises) Ordinance (Cap. 376). It aims to provide immediate financial relief to CoC holders whose businesses have been hard-hit by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic and social distancing measures imposed by the Government.

Holders of a CoC with validity falling within the period(s) when the relevant directions issued pursuant to the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) are in effect, are eligible for application. Eligible CoC holders should submit their applications to the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) under the Home Affairs Department. The deadline for application is May 18. Upon submission of the completed application form and supporting documents, the disbursement of subsidies could generally be made in around two weeks.

The application form and guidelines can be downloaded from the website of the OLA (www.hadla.gov.hk) or obtained from the office of the OLA (Address: 10th Floor, 14 Taikoo Wan Road, Taikoo Shing, Hong Kong). For details, please contact the OLA at 3107 3021 or visit the website of the OLA.

ENB relief measures to provide financial support for the trade

To help the municipal solid waste (MSW) transfer sector cope with the current economic situation and the operational difficulties arising from the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government initiated the Subsidy Scheme for the Refuse Transfer Station Account Holders for Transporting MSW under the newly-announced anti-epidemic measures to allocate financial support of about \$7 million for the trade. The scheme was endorsed by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council today (April 18).

A spokesman for the Environment Bureau (ENB) said, "The Government's anti-epidemic relief measures include a \$21 billion initiative to provide 16 types of support for specific sectors. The subsidy scheme is one of the 16 support initiatives.

"The MSW transfer sector is facing a challenging business environment. To assist the trade in increasing resources to enhance the provision of

workers' personal protective equipment and strengthen the disinfection of refuse transport vehicles to curb the risk of virus transmission and maintain environmental hygiene, the ENB has established the subsidy scheme. The scheme offers a one-off relief subsidy of \$8,000 to each of the eligible private MSW collectors operating in the first quarter of this year, i.e. every refuse transfer station account holder who transported MSW to refuse transfer stations or landfills between January 1 and March 31 of this year, to support the industry in coping with the challenges," the spokesman added.

The subsidy scheme is expected to benefit about 800 private MSW collectors, of which 70 per cent are individual refuse transfer station account holders. To ease the application procedures, the Environmental Protection Department will post cheques to recipients of this special subsidy in about a week after the funding endorsement, with a view to relieving difficulties of the trade as soon as possible.

In addition to the above subsidy scheme, the ENB will create environmental protection-related time-limited jobs in the coming two years and strengthen its existing relief measures.

On relief measures regarding sewage charges, the Government announced last December a provision of some \$120 million to waive 75 per cent of sewage charges for non-domestic accounts for four months. The Budget further provided \$120 million to extend the waiver period for four months. Under the current anti-epidemic measures, the Government has allocated an extra \$120 million to waive sewage charges for another four months, from August to November this year, making the total waiver period 12 months. Some 250 000 non-domestic accounts will benefit from this, subject to a monthly cap of \$12,500 per account. The relevant relief measures will be implemented after revisions of the Government regulations concerned. Non-domestic account holders are expected to receive respective bills reflecting the waiver in the second or third quarter of this year.

On rental concession arrangements, eligible tenants of EcoPark, country park refreshment kiosks and Hong Kong Wetland Park under the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department received a rental concession of 50 per cent from October 2019 to March this year. The rental concession period has been extended for another six months to September this year. Under the current anti-epidemic measures, the rental concessions from April to September this year will be increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. The total rental waiver for the entire 12-month period amounts to more than \$17 million.

The Recycling Fund (RF) last year launched the "One-off Rental Support Scheme", benefiting about 500 street-corner recycling shops and 400 recycling sites. The scheme, which originally ran from October 2019 to March this year, has been extended for six months to September this year, with a total provision of about \$200 million for the covered period. To tie in with the Government's epidemic measures, the RF has further earmarked funding of about \$50 million to increase the rental subsidies from 50 per cent to 75 per cent for the subsidy period from April to September this year. The maximum monthly

rental subsidy for each recycler will be increased from \$25,000 to \$37,500, setting the maximum total rental subsidy for the 12-month period at \$375,000.

Travel Agents and Practitioners

Support Scheme and Hotel Sector

Support Scheme open for applications

Following the approval of the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council today (April 18), the Travel Agents and Practitioners Support Scheme and the Hotel Sector Support Scheme are now open for applications. The deadlines for applications are June 15, 2020, and May 18, 2020 respectively.

The schemes will provide the following subsidies for the tourism trade:

- (1) A subsidy ranging from \$20,000 up to \$200,000 to each licensed travel agent, depending on the number of its employees. Some 1 730 agents are expected to benefit from this scheme;
- (2) A monthly subsidy of \$5,000 for six months to each travel agent's staff and freelance accredited practitioners whose main occupations are tourist guides or tour escorts. Some 26 000 persons are expected to benefit from this scheme; and
- (3) A subsidy of up to \$400,000 to each licensed hotel. About 300 hotels are expected to benefit from this scheme.

The application details of the schemes are available at Tourism Commission's website (www.tourism.gov.hk).

The Government will also provide financial assistance to the cruise industry under the Anti-epidemic Fund, including waiving the monthly fixed rent and the management fees of Kai Tak Cruise Terminal for six months as well as refunding cruise lines of berth deposits for cancelled ship calls during the suspension of immigration service at the cruise terminal when they schedule other ship calls in future. The Government will inform cruise terminal operators and relevant cruise companies of the details separately.

Enhancements to Special 100% Loan Guarantee

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

HKMC Insurance Limited (HKMCI), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited, announces that, with the approval of financial commitment by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council today (April 18), the total guarantee commitment of the Special 100% Loan Guarantee under the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme (SFGS) is increased to HK\$50 billion. The maximum loan amount per enterprise is increased to HK\$4 million and the principal moratorium arrangement is extended to the first 12 months. The Special 100% Loan Guarantee will start receiving applications from next Monday (April 20), and the application period is extended to one year.

For public enquiries, please call the SFGS Hotline at 2536 0392.