

FHB announces the first incidence for latest smoking prevalence rate in Hong Kong to attain single digit

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, announced today (May 26) that the smoking prevalence rate in Hong Kong has dropped continuously from 23.3 per cent in the early 1980s to 9.5 per cent in 2021. It is the first time for the latest smoking prevalence rate to attain a single digit.

The Census and Statistics Department today published the latest Thematic Household Survey (THS) Report. According to the THS Report, about 581 000 persons were found to be daily conventional cigarette smokers at the time of the survey conducted from April to July last year, accounting for 9.5 per cent of the local population aged 15 and above. Corresponding figure in 2019 was 10.2 per cent.

"It is an important milestone in Hong Kong's tobacco control effort with the smoking prevalence rate dropped to a single digit, but yet we cannot afford complacency. We will continue to further reduce the smoking prevalence rate in Hong Kong proactively through multi-pronged approach, including legislation, taxation, health education and co-operation with community partners to take forward more focused smoking cessation services, so as to safeguard the health of Hong Kong citizens." Professor Chan said.

For alternative smoking products (ASPs), according to the THS Report, the percentage of daily electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) smokers aged 15 and above in the population was 0.3 per cent in 2021 (some 17 500 persons in actual figure), while the corresponding percentage was 0.1 per cent in 2019 (some 7 200 persons in actual figure). For heated tobacco products (HTPs), the survey found that the percentage of daily HTP smokers aged 15 and above in the population was 0.1 per cent (some 8 400 persons in actual figure), while the corresponding percentage was 0.2 per cent in 2019 (some 13 100 persons in actual figure).

On the other hand, the Food and Health Bureau commissioned the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong to conduct a school-based survey from December 2020 to December 2021 on smoking pattern among Primary and Secondary students (HKU Study). According to the HKU Study, the smoking prevalence rate among Primary and Secondary students remained low, but the percentage of Secondary students smoking e-cigarettes has increased. The HKU Study also found that 1.1 per cent of Secondary 1 to Secondary 6 students claimed in the 2020/21 school year that they were smoking e-cigarettes at the time, while 0.8 per cent was recorded in 2019.

Professor Chan pointed out that given the harm of ASPs posed to local public health, it is necessary for the Government to take action even when the number of ASP smokers among Primary and Secondary students remained low,

and to ban ASPs through legislation so as to stop them from further infiltrating Hong Kong before it becomes popular in Hong Kong. Since the Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 (Amendment Ordinance) came into effect on April 30, 2022, no person may import, promote, manufacture, sell, or possess for commercial purposes ASPs, including e-cigarettes, HTPs and herbal cigarettes. The Government hopes that the prevalence rate of using ASPs will decrease with the Amendment Ordinance coming into effect.

Looking ahead, Professor Chan said that the Government will enhance tobacco control measures, including measures to reduce non-smokers from picking up the smoking habit and provide full support to smokers to quit smoking, in a comprehensive manner with a view to further lowering smoking prevalence rate. The Government will also work closely with various partners to strengthen public education and research projects so as to explore new initiatives to enhance smoking cessation services, especially those services and relevant policy measures targeting adolescent, women, as well as e-cigarette and HTP smokers. The Department of Health will launch the "Quit in June" campaign, and work in collaboration with the Hospital Authority, District Health Centres/District Health Centre Expresses, the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health and other medical institutions in assisting people to quit smoking and promoting tobacco-free life.

"In order to achieve the long-term goal of eliminating smoking hazard, the Government will make reference to experiences from other places and actively carry out the formulation of Tobacco Endgame, provide a timetable and roadmap, and launch a comprehensive tobacco control strategy to safeguard public health. The Government is exploring along the directions of reducing public exposure to second-hand smoke, curtailing the attractiveness of smoking products and eliminating the harm of smoking products to the next generation. The Government plans to consult the public on the proposal within this year. The next-term Government will continue to promote tobacco control work with a view to achieving a smoke-free Hong Kong," Professor Chan said.