

## Pet dog further tests positive for antibodies for COVID-19 virus

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said today (March 26) that the latest positive serology test results of the Pomeranian which previously tested weak positive for COVID-19 virus proved that the dog has been infected with the virus.

Virus isolation was performed on previous samples taken from the Pomeranian with a negative result, indicating that no live virus was retrieved. This is in line with the amount of virus genetic material in the samples. Further serological testing has been conducted at the World Health Organization reference laboratory at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) on the blood sample taken on March 3 and the final test result is positive. This indicates that the Pomeranian had developed an immune response to the viral infection with antibodies found in the blood. Veterinary experts and scientists from the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences of City University of Hong Kong, as well as the School of Public Health of the HKU, have concluded that the result further supported that the Pomeranian has been infected with the COVID-19 virus.

The spokesman also stressed that these cases of infection in dogs appear to be infrequent. As at yesterday (March 25), the AFCD has conducted tests on 17 dogs and eight cats from households with confirmed COVID-19 cases or persons in close contact with confirmed patients, and only two dogs had tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

These findings indicate that dogs and cats are not infected easily with this virus, and there is no evidence that they play a role in the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, as COVID-19 is a newly emerged disease and the situation is still evolving, the AFCD is taking a precautionary approach in quarantining animals (mammals, including cats and dogs) from households with confirmed COVID-19 human cases.

The spokesman reminded pet owners to adopt good hygiene practices (including hand washing before and after being around or handling animals, their food, or supplies, as well as avoiding kissing them) and to maintain a clean and hygienic household environment. People who are sick should restrict contacting animals. If there are any changes in the health condition of the pets, advice from a veterinarian should be sought as soon as possible. There is currently no evidence that pet animals become sick and under no circumstances should they abandon their pets.

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# Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee convenes third meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the third meeting of the Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee today (March 26).

The Steering Committee examined the latest progress of the 24 measures under the \$30 billion Anti-epidemic Fund (the Fund). It also reviewed how to better support businesses and individuals affected by the epidemic on a wider basis through the existing 24 measures.

Among the 24 measures under the Fund, 10 measures are aimed at enhancing anti-epidemic capability and the remaining 14 measures are deployed with the objective to support enterprises and safeguard jobs to provide one-off subsidies to assist affected enterprises (such as the transport sector, travel agencies, eateries and retailers, etc) and to disburse special grants to the needy and disadvantaged groups. Various measures under the Fund have been rolled out progressively and are expected to benefit over 110 000 business establishments, 200 000 families and 1 470 000 persons.

One of the 24 measures under the Fund is the \$5.6 billion Retail Sector Subsidy Scheme which provides relief to retailers hard hit by the epidemic to help tide them over their financial difficulties and to continue their businesses. The Scheme has been open for applications since March 23 and each eligible retail store will receive a one-off subsidy of \$80,000. The Scheme is expected to benefit some 70 000 retail stores.

The Steering Committee is pleased to note the overwhelming response from the retail sector. As at 8am March 26, which is only a couple of days since the launch of the Scheme, the Scheme had already received nearly 40 000 applications, with most of them being from small-scale retail stores. The application period for the Scheme will end on April 12.

Mr Cheung said that the Government aims to give out the first tranche of payment to the first batch of eligible applicants in early April.

"We will process the applications and disburse the subsidies as soon as possible to provide timely relief to retailers hard hit by the epidemic to help tide them over the financial difficulties and continue their businesses," he stressed.

The Steering Committee is chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, and members include nine relevant Directors of Bureaux. The Steering Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the measures and the use of Fund, and will examine the progress reports from relevant bureaux and departments.

## Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected illicit heat-not-burn products (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs today (March 26) seized about 570 000 suspected illicit heat-not-burn (HNB) products with an estimated market value of about \$1.6 million and a duty potential of about \$1.1 million at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound.

Through risk assessment, Customs officers inspected a 20-foot container declared as containing foods and daily goods arriving in Hong Kong from Kobe, Japan. After inspection, Customs officers found the batch of suspected illicit HNB products inside 79 cartons mix-loaded with other goods inside the container.

Investigation is ongoing.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (DCO), tobacco products are dutiable goods to which the DCO applies. All HNB products containing tobacco in content are also dutiable goods subject to the control of the DCO. Any person who imports, possesses, sells or buys dutiable commodities without a valid licence commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities 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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## Correctional Services Department combats illicit activities (with photos)

Following a series of measures adopted in mid-March to combat collective illicit activities at the Tai Lam Correctional Institution, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) today (March 26) launched another operation to combat illicit activities.

Intelligence has revealed that following the operations launched in mid-March by the CSD, some aggrieved persons in custody had planned to incite a large group of persons in custody to engage in certain collective activities with a view to acting against the institution's management personnel, who immediately closely monitored the target persons in custody. At around 7.30am today, during the issue of the morning meal, a male person in custody disrupted order in a dining hall, whereupon correctional officers immediately took disciplinary action against him. A group of persons in custody then lodged a collective complaint to exert pressure on the institution's management to rescind the disciplinary action and stop combating the illicit activities in the institution. Intelligence also revealed that the persons in custody have incited others to participate in the collective illicit activities with the aim of worsening the situation.

Following an assessment and detailed planning, the CSD deployed at 2pm today reinforcements of more than 70 staff to the Tai Lam Correctional Institution, including the Regional Response Team, staff of Security Section, a Dog Unit and other reinforcement staff to conduct a surprise search on the target persons. A total of 22 persons in custody suspected of being involved in the collective illicit activities were removed from association and put under investigation. The operation is still in progress and the CSD will continue to closely monitor developments.

In order to assist persons in custody to rehabilitate in a safe and orderly environment, the CSD spares no effort in combating illicit activities of all kinds in its institutions.

Tai Lam Correctional Institution is a minimum security prison for the detention of male adult persons in custody who have records of repeated imprisonment.



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## Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (March 26), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 210 patients (97 male and 113 female, aged 7 months to 89) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria of COVID-19. Appropriate tests have been arranged for the patients.

There are 441 patients under isolation currently. So far, 110 patients who had COVID-19 confirmed or probable infection have been discharged upon recovery.

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.