

Retail Sector Subsidy Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund open for applications

The Retail Sector Subsidy Scheme (the Scheme) launched under the Government's Anti-epidemic Fund has opened for applications today (March 23).

The Scheme's dedicated online application system (website address: retailsubsidy.gov.hk) has also commenced operation. To expedite the application process and minimise the time required for vetting the eligibility of applications received, the Scheme will only accept applications through its dedicated system.

The application period for the Scheme will end at 11.59pm on April 12. As the subsidy under the Scheme is not allocated on a first-come-first-serve basis, there is no need for applicants to rush their submissions in the beginning of the application period.

Applications will be processed concurrently during the three-week application period and will be assessed on the basis of the information provided. To avoid delays in processing, applicants should ensure the accuracy of the information provided. The Government reminds applicants that anyone providing untrue information or false documents in an attempt to receive the subsidy constitutes a criminal offence and may be subject to prosecution.

For enquiries concerning details and the application procedure of the Scheme, applicants can call the telephone hotline (1836 111) or email to enquiry@retailsubsidy.hk.

Latest arrangement on PlanD public services

In line with the latest adjustment to public services in response to the latest situation of COVID-19 announced by the Government, and to reduce social contacts and the risk of spreading the disease in the community, the Planning Department (PlanD) announced today (March 23) that starting from today, the department will provide essential and limited public services only until further notice.

The Planning Enquiry Counter (PEC) on 17th floor of North Point Government Offices (NPGO) will continue to make available documents required

under the Town Planning Ordinance for public inspection, while other counter services will be suspended. Meanwhile, the PEC on the 14th floor of Sha Tin Government Offices will be temporarily closed and no public services will be provided.

District Planning Offices of the PlanD will suspend all fieldwork, including posting of site notices for planning applications. No site notices will be posted for planning applications published during this period until further notice. Notices of planning applications will continue be published in the prescribed newspapers and posted on the Town Planning Board's (TPB) website (www.info.gov.hk/tpb). Members of the public are invited to pay attention to such notices in the newspapers and on the TPB website.

To reduce the risk of the spread of the disease in the community, members of the public are encouraged to avoid visiting the PEC. They may make enquiries through the telephone hotline (2231 5000) or email (enquire@pland.gov.hk), and can visit the PlanD's website (www.pland.gov.hk) for general planning information.

Meanwhile, the receipt and dispatch counter of the department (18/F, NPGO) will continue to maintain basic services during office hours (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

The Town Planning Board Secretariat's Reception Counter will continue to maintain services for collection of submissions made under the Town Planning Ordinance via the drop-in box located on the 15th floor of NPGO during office hours (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday). Other counter services will be temporarily suspended until further notice. Members of the public can continue to make enquiries through the telephone hotline (2231 4810) or email (tpbpd@pland.gov.hk), and can visit the TPB's website for statutory planning information.

City Gallery will continue to be temporarily closed until further notice. All educational activities and docent services will be cancelled during the closure period.

For enquiries, please call the hotline 2231 5000 during office hours or visit the PlanD's website.

MD announcement

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

The Marine Department today (March 23) reminded masters, coxswains and persons-in-charge of vessels navigating in Hong Kong waters to proceed at a safe speed and exercise extreme caution because restricted visibility of less than 2 nautical miles has been reported.

Appropriate sound signals shall be made when underway or at anchor. All vessels must comply with the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea.

Also, when radar is used without the benefit of adequate plotting facilities, the information obtained from the equipment is rather limited and should be construed accordingly.

Visibility reports are broadcast by the Vessel Traffic Centre (VTC) on VHF channels 02, 12, 14, 63 and 67.

In the event of an accident, a report shall be made immediately to the VTC at Tel: 2233 7801.

CHP investigates 44 additional cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 4pm today (March 22), the CHP is investigating 44 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19, taking the number of cases to 318 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 317 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases announced today involve 28 males and 16 females aged between 1 and 72. Among them, 29 had travel history during the incubation period. The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex.

For information on flights that patients of the confirmed cases have taken, please refer to the following webpage: (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/flights_trains_en.pdf). Passengers who travelled on the same flights and sat within two seats surrounding those patients are urged to call the CHP hotlines 2125 1111 and 2125 1122.

The CHP again urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons, who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "In view of proliferation of the disease and continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong."

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes."

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps); cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use; after using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

The CHP will report the cases to the World Health Organization, National Health Commission, Health Commission of Guangdong Province, relevant health authorities and the Hospital Authority.

The CHP has set up the hotlines (2125 1111 and 2125 1122), which operate from 8am to midnight daily, for public enquiries. As at 4pm today, a total of 44 418 calls were received.

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on the COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a liter of water into each drain outlet (U-traps) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing

facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing.

Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and

- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

Update on COVID-19 test centres

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

From March 20 to 10pm today (March 22), 197 and 42 travellers have been referred to the test centres at the AsiaWorld-Expo and North Lantau Hospital respectively for COVID-19 viral test. So far, 181 travellers have negative test results for COVID-19 and have returned to their residence to continue the 14-day home quarantine.

Preliminary positive test results will be further confirmed by the Department of Health and announced as confirmed cases in due course.