

CHP investigates 48 additional cases of COVID-19 and improves the samples collection arrangement under the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 4pm today (March 20), the CHP is investigating 48 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19, taking the number of cases to 257 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 256 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Regarding the extension of the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme to cover asymptomatic persons under the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) starting yesterday (March 19), with an aim to further facilitate the persons under quarantine to have their family members or friends deliver the deep throat saliva samples for the free testing service for COVID-19, the DH will increase the collection points to cover a number of General Out-patients clinics under the Hospital Authority (collection time: from Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 9:30 am except public holiday). Meanwhile, collection time from 9am to 12noon this Saturday and Sunday (March 21 and 22) will be arranged at the 13 designated chest clinics or dermatological clinics under the DH.

The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the CHP provides testing for 5 000 samples from the relevant persons per week. Persons under quarantine aged 65 or above or persons under quarantine residing with elderly persons aged 65 or above are target individuals at this stage. The DH's personnel will provide a specimen container to the relevant inbound travellers at Hong Kong International Airport. They are required to collect their deep throat saliva sample in the morning on the specified collection date by themselves at home in accordance with the instructions, and to have their family members or friends deliver it to any of the collection points in the morning on the collection date. If a sample tests positive, the CHP will notify the person concerned and arrange for admission to a public hospital for treatment as early as possible. In general, if no notification is received within three working days after returning a sample, it means the test result is negative and the person concerned is required to continue the quarantine until the quarantine period ends.

Today's cases involve 26 males and 22 females aged between four and 69. Among them, 35 had travel history during the incubation period. For case details, please see Annex I. The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For the progress on the contact tracing of the cases, please see Annex II.

For information on flights that patients of the confirmed cases have taken, please refer to the following website: (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 hotline 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 spokesman said, "The CHP 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, which operate from 8am to midnight daily, for public enquiries. As at 4pm yesterday, a total of 40 470 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.

HKSAR Government assists Hong Kong residents in Morocco

As a measure against COVID-19, the Moroccan authorities have announced temporary suspension of air traffic, which has left some Hong Kong residents stranded in the country. In response to media enquiries, a Government spokesman today (March 20) said that relevant bureaux / departments are rendering assistance to affected Hong Kong residents to facilitate their return to Hong Kong through different channels.

On March 15, the Moroccan authorities announced the complete suspension of international flights to and from Morocco. The Security Bureau and Immigration Department have all along been in contact with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR (OCMFA), the Chinese Embassy in the Kingdom of Morocco, and the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in China, the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong and relevant travel agencies to understand the situation and take follow up actions.

As at today, the Immigration Department, through the 1868 hotline, and the referrals from the Chinese Embassy in the Kingdom of Morocco and Legislative Council members, received assistance requests from 147 Hong Kong

residents concerning the home passage to Hong Kong. Among them 70 are from group tours, and more than 70 are individual travellers. The Immigration Department immediately rendered proper advice and assistance to these Hong Kong residents in accordance with their and their families' wishes. With the coordination between the Government and the commercial airlines, 72 of them have already booked their flights home. They have either already boarded on different flights, or have secured return arrangements.

â€‹In order to assist the Hong Kong residents to return to Hong Kong, the Government has been taking actions on multiple fronts. Among others, through the Office of the Government of the HKSAR of the People's Republic of China in Beijing (Beijing Office) and the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in China, the Government sought information from the Moroccan authorities about the operation of commercial flights in Morocco. Besides, the Civil Aviation Department has been actively liaising with the airlines which still operated at the airport of Casablanca, with a view to securing flight booking for Hong Kong residents to fly out of Morocco to the destinations via which they can transit back to Hong Kong.

â€‹The Government will continue to closely monitor COVID-19 related measures implemented by the Moroccan authorities and their impact on the Hong Kong residents in the country. The Security Bureau and the Immigration Department will stay in close contact with OCMFA, the respective embassies in both places, the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, relevant travel agencies as well as the affected Hong Kong residents and their families in order to render assistance and keep in view the developments.

Hong Kong residents travelling outside Hong Kong who need assistance may call the 24-hour hotline of the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department at (852) 1868.

[Anti-epidemic Fund allowance supporting frontline cleansing and security workers to be rolled out](#)

A government spokesman today (Mar 20) said that bureaux and departments and the Hong Kong Housing Authority ("HA") are approaching service contractors under their appointment to appeal for their assistance in transferring the monthly allowance of \$1,000 under the Anti-epidemic Fund to frontline cleansing workers, toilet attendants and security workers.

Being one of the measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund, the allowance aims at supporting frontline cleansing workers, toilet attendants and security workers employed by service contractors of the Government and HA in

anti-epidemic efforts. Eligible frontline workers will receive a monthly allowance of \$1,000 for a period of no less than four months. The Government and HA are now working with their contractors to confirm implementation details and enter into agreements, so that the contractors can transfer the monthly allowance to eligible workers.

The Government spokesman emphasised, "Frontline workers are not required to submit any application to the Government for the allowance. Our target is to effect payments for the first round of the monthly allowance to the contractors by the end of this month, and for contractors to transfer the allowance to their eligible employees."

The Government spokesman extended appreciation to relevant contractors for their proactive assistance in transferring the allowance, so that frontline workers would benefit as soon as possible. Contractors may direct enquiries to the government departments and/or HA by which they are appointed.

In view of the development of the epidemic, outsourced cleansing workers and toilet attendants have been rendering assistance in the enhanced cleansing and disinfection of premises and public areas of the Government and HA, so as to upkeep good environmental hygiene. Outsourced security workers have been maintaining frequent contacts with the general public as part of their duties. The allowance disbursed under the Anti-epidemic Fund gives recognition to these outsourced frontline workers for their committed services provided at this critical juncture, and seeks to support their anti-epidemic efforts.

[CE visits Auxiliary Medical Service Headquarters \(with photos/videos\)](#)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, visited the Auxiliary Medical Service (AMS) Headquarters in Ho Man Tin today (March 20) to thank the AMS personnel for their full support for the enforcement of the compulsory quarantine to safeguard public health.

Accompanied by the Commissioner of the AMS and the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan, and the Chief Staff Officer of the AMS, Mr Wong Ying-keung, Mrs Lam visited the AMS Headquarters to know more about the work of the AMS amid the epidemic. This included the assistance given to escort persons under quarantine to quarantine centres and the escorting of persons under quarantine with chronic illnesses for treatment or follow-up medical consultations as well as the collection of prescription medications for them. The AMS members also assist the Department of Health to provide medical

services at quarantine centres. At the meeting with the front-line AMS personnel, Mrs Lam thanked them for fighting against the COVID-19 infection at the forefront, and for working hard to provide indispensable services to people under quarantine. She stressed that the Government will prioritise the provision of protective gear and equipment including surgical masks to them.

The AMS is a brigade formed by volunteers which come from all walks of life including healthcare professionals working in public and private healthcare sectors. In times of emergency and natural disaster, the AMS supplements the regular medical and health services while it reinforces the regular ambulance services and provides first aid service at public functions in its daily operation. During the epidemic, more than 100 AMS members assist in the enforcement of compulsory quarantine matters every day.

Mrs Lam said with the persistent and rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases globally, the Government is doing its utmost to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus from overseas to protect people's health, including the implementation of the compulsory quarantine commenced at 0.00am yesterday for all persons who have stayed in overseas countries and territories for any period during the 14 days preceding their arrival in Hong Kong. Stressing that the AMS provides vital support for the anti-epidemic work of the Government, she said the epidemic is expected to last for a period of time and that she hopes that members of the AMS will continue to rise to the challenge to protect people's health together.



CS visits OGCI0's monitoring centre in North Point

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, this afternoon (March 20) visited the monitoring centre of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) at Customs Headquarters Building in North Point to observe its operation and expressed his support for the staff and volunteers at the centre. The monitoring centres are established to monitor the persons under compulsory quarantine are staying at their dwelling places.

Accompanied by the Commissioner of Customs and Excise, Mr Hermes Tang, and the Deputy Government Chief Information Officer, Mr Tony Wong, Mr Cheung met with staff to observe how the monitoring centre could cope with the upsurge of workload in the past few weeks and how the new "StayHomeSafe" mobile app could strengthen the monitoring work.

At present, OGCI0 has set up three monitoring centres where location-sharing functions of communication software, video calls, electronic wristbands and the new "StayHomeSafe" mobile app are used to ensure that persons undergoing quarantine are staying at their dwelling places.

"StayHomeSafe" mobile app was developed jointly by a local start-up at the Hong Kong Science Park and a local university. It has been in use since last Monday (March 9). The mobile app makes use of artificial intelligence and big data to analyse changes of communication signals in the open environment to ascertain whether persons who are subject to compulsory quarantine are staying at their dwelling places.

Mr Cheung was pleased to note that the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app could help further improve the operation of the home quarantine measure and thanked staff and volunteers of the monitoring centre for their relentless effort in protecting the well-being of the general public. They have contributed positively to the implementation of the home quarantine measure by ensuring persons under compulsory quarantine are staying at their dwelling places, and at the same time help explain to them quarantine arrangements and handle relevant enquiries.

He was also delighted to learn that OGCI0 has mobilised over 200 volunteers, including retired civil servants, to join the work of all monitoring centres to alleviate the work pressure of centre staff. He expressed his deepest gratitude to the volunteers for their dedication to safeguarding Hong Kong people's health.

Mr Cheung called on those under home quarantine to abide strictly by the quarantine requirement in order to reduce the risk of virus transmission. He stressed that with the concerted efforts of the Government and the public,

Hong Kong would win this battle against the epidemic.