

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (March 20), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 267 patients (121 male and 146 female, aged one to 82) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria of COVID-19. Appropriate tests have been arranged for the patients.

There are 363 patients under isolation currently. So far, 98 patients who had COVID-19 confirmed or probable infections 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.

Twenty-nine persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations, including operations codenamed "Twilight", "Rally" and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" from March 16 to yesterday (March 19). A total of 19 suspected illegal workers, nine suspected employers and one overstayer were arrested.

During operation "Twilight" and "Rally", ImmD Task Force officers raided 1 386 target locations including a bar, construction sites, a factory, massage parlors, restaurants, stores and a wet market. Eighteen suspected illegal workers and eight employers were arrested. The suspected illegal workers comprised nine men and nine women, aged 27 to 58. Among them, one man and two women were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. In addition, one man and three women were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards. Meanwhile, five men and three women, aged 41 to 64, were suspected of employing the illegal workers. Furthermore, one male overstayer, aged 53, was arrested.

In addition, during operation "Champion", enforcement officers raided 10 target locations in Chai Wan and North Point including massage parlors, a

restaurant and residential buildings. One male suspected illegal worker, aged 46, was arrested. Meanwhile, one woman, aged 50, suspected of employing the illegal worker was also arrested.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases. It is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Offenders are liable to prosecution and a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screenings of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting

services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

Government to sell site in Kai Tak by public tender

The Lands Department (LandsD) announced today (March 20) that New Kowloon Inland Lot No. 6615 at Kai Tak Area 2A Site 4, Site 5(B) and Site 10, Kai Tak, Kowloon, in the 2019-20 Land Sale Programme will be disposed of by public tender. The tender invitation for the lot will commence on March 27 and close on May 8.

New Kowloon Inland Lot No. 6615 has a site area of about 19,788 square metres and is designated for non-industrial (excluding private residential, godown and petrol filling station) purposes. The minimum gross floor area and the maximum gross floor area are 64,679 sq m and 107,797 sq m respectively. Both include the gross floor area of Government Accommodation, being two sets of residential care home for the elderly cum day care unit for the elderly, one parents/relatives resource centre and one residential child care centre, to be constructed by the purchaser.

Land sale documents including the Form of Tender, the Tender Notice, the Conditions of Sale and the sale plans of the lot will be available for downloading from the LandsD website (www.landso.gov.hk), and the sale plans will be available for distribution and inspection by the public from March 27, when the particulars of the tender will also be gazetted.

Results of Strategic Public Policy Research Funding Scheme 2019-20 announced

The Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (PICO) announced today (March 20) the results of the 2019-20 Strategic Public Policy Research (SPPR) Funding Scheme.

On the advice of the Assessment Panel, PICO has supported three projects with total funding of about \$12.8 million in the 2019-20 SPPR Funding Scheme. A total of 26 applications had been received.

The SPPR Funding Scheme aims to support longer-term public policy research on strategic themes, build up research capacity and facilitate collaboration among institutions/think tanks on the strategic themes. The strategic themes for 2019-20 include (1) Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area; (2) Belt and Road Initiative; (3) Big Data/Smart City; (4) Innovation and Technology/Artificial Intelligence/Re-Industrialisation; (5) Developing Green Finance in Hong Kong; (6) City Branding Strategy for Hong Kong; (7) Consolidating Hong Kong's Position as an International Logistics Hub; (8) Transitional Housing; (9) Children and Youth Development; (10) Ageing Population; (11) Healthcare System Innovation; and (12) Manpower Supply and Development.

Applications to the SPPR Funding Scheme are invited once a year, normally in the second quarter of a year. Applications are assessed by an assessment panel, chaired by and comprising experienced academics, who will take into account comments of reviewers who are academics and experts outside the panel in considering the applications. Each application is considered on its merits and the strategic relevance to public policy development of Hong Kong. A declaration of interests system is in place to ensure that the assessments are fair and impartial.

Details of the funded projects have been uploaded to PICO's website (www.pico.gov.hk/en/PRFS).

Statistics of Stored Value Facilities (SVF) Schemes issued by SVF licensees

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (March 20) statistics on Stored Value Facilities (SVF) schemes issued by SVF licensees for the fourth quarter of 2019.

The SVF scheme statistics (see Annex) include quarterly data on SVF schemes issued by the eighteen SVF licensees (Note 1).

According to the quarterly statistics, the total number of SVF accounts in use (Note 2) was 63.12 million by the end of Q4/2019, representing a 1.0 per cent increase from the previous quarter. The total number of SVF transactions (Note 3) was around 1.5 billion for Q4/2019, or 5.1 per cent lower than the previous quarter. The total value of SVF transactions was HK\$53.0 billion for Q4/2019, representing a 3.5 per cent increase from the previous quarter. Of the total transaction value, HK\$23.4 billion was related to point-of-sale spending payment, HK\$21.6 billion in online spending payment and HK\$7.9 billion in P2P funds transfer. The total float and SVF

deposit (Note 4) was HK\$11.6 billion for Q4/2019, 3.4 per cent higher than the previous quarter.

As compared with the end of Q4/2018, the total number of SVF accounts in use at the end of Q4/2019 was up by 12.5 per cent, and the total float and SVF deposit was up by 18.9 per cent. The total number and value of SVF transactions during Q4/2019 were down by 7.9 per cent and up by 10.1 per cent respectively year-on-year.

Notes:

1. The SVF scheme statistics are compiled from data on SVF schemes issued by the eighteen SVF licensees. The SVF licensees, in alphabetical order, are 33 Financial Services Limited, Alipay Financial Services (HK) Limited, Autotoll Limited, Bank of Communications (Hong Kong) Limited, Dah Sing Bank, Limited, ePaylinks Technology Co., Limited, Geoswift Cards Services Limited, HKT Payment Limited, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (The), K & R International Limited, Octopus Cards Limited, Optal Asia Limited, PayPal Hong Kong Limited, TNG (Asia) Limited, Transforex (Hong Kong) Investment Consulting Co., Limited, UniCard Solution Limited, WeChat Pay Hong Kong Limited, and Yintran Group Holdings Limited.

2. "Total number of SVF accounts in use" refers to the total number of SVF accounts that can be used as at the end of the reporting period.

3. SVF transactions include point-of-sale spending payment, online spending payment and P2P funds transfer.

4. The following terms follow their definitions in the Payment Systems and Stored Value Facilities Ordinance:

- "Float" means the stored value remaining on the facility but does not include any SVF deposit;
- "SVF deposit" means a deposit placed with the licensee, or another person on behalf of the licensee, for enabling the facility to be used.