

Two suspected cases test negative for MERS-CoV

The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health today (March 17) reported that two suspected cases (28-year-old female and 29-year-old male patients) of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) pending results yesterday (March 16) upon preliminary testing have tested negative for MERS Coronavirus. Meanwhile, the test result of a suspected case yesterday involving a 27-year-old male patient is pending.

DH social hygiene service arrangement

The Department of Health (DH) today (March 17) announced that following its earlier announcements on service adjustments in response to the latest situation of COVID-19, the following social hygiene services will also be further adjusted starting tomorrow (March 18).

The social hygiene service of Wan Chai Female Social Hygiene Clinic and Wan Chai Male Social Hygiene Clinic will be suspended starting tomorrow until further notice. Patients in need could attend other social hygiene clinics. The DH will also make separate arrangements for affected users with prior appointments.

Meanwhile, Yau Ma Tei Female Social Hygiene Clinic, the social hygiene service of Chai Wan Social Hygiene Clinic as well as the evening service of Yau Ma Tei Male Social Hygiene Clinic (which provides service on Tuesdays) remain suspended. Other social hygiene clinics and opening hours will remain as usual.

Please visit the following websites for the information on social hygiene clinics:

Male: www.dh.gov.hk/english/tele/tele_chc/tele_chc_shcm.html; and
Female: www.dh.gov.hk/english/tele/tele_chc/tele_chc_shcf.html.

EDB progressively disburses anti-

epidemic subsidies and support grants to schools

The one-off Special Anti-epidemic Grant to all schools offering full and formal curriculum in Hong Kong and the Support Grant to all kindergartens (KGs) announced earlier by the Education Bureau (EDB) will be disbursed starting from March.

A spokesman for the EDB said today (March 17) that all schools offering full and formal curriculum (i.e. all public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, private primary and secondary schools and KGs) would receive the one-off Special Anti-epidemic Grant to help them replenish their epidemic prevention equipment, clean their school premises and pay for other expenses related to epidemic prevention. The amount of grant ranges from \$10,000 to \$25,000, depending on the type and size of the school. The additional expenditure is estimated to be \$42 million, benefitting some 2 200 schools.

Public sector schools and other schools receiving government subsidies are expected to receive the grant this month at the earliest. No application is required. Other schools are expected to receive the grant starting from April at the earliest.

Meanwhile, the boarding sections of aided special schools have been operating to cater for students in need of boarding service during the class suspension. To enhance the support for the boarding sections to guard against the epidemic, the EDB will separately provide a one-off additional grant for 21 special schools with a boarding section. The amount of the grant is determined by their approved boarding capacity, ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000. It will incur an additional expenditure of \$2.25 million. The grant will also be disbursed to these schools this month.

As regards KGs, in addition to the above-mentioned Special Anti-epidemic Grant for all KGs, the EDB will also provide a lump sum grant for each KG to assist them in tackling operational difficulties caused by the epidemic, incurring an additional expenditure of about \$120 million. Schools joining the kindergarten education scheme (Scheme-KGs) will receive a grant ranging from \$60,000 to \$160,000, depending on their types (i.e. half-day, whole-day and long whole-day) and size. The grant will be disbursed within March. The EDB will also use the number of students in January this year as the basis for calculation of the monthly subsidy for each Scheme-KG during the class suspension to ensure that there will be no reduction of government subsidies due to the absence or withdrawal of individual students during the period. For non-Scheme KGs, each KG will receive a Support Grant of \$80,000 to be disbursed starting from April.

Regarding the Student Grant for 2019/20 school year, which has been increased from \$2,500 to \$3,500 per student, allocated from the Anti-epidemic Fund amounting to \$900 million, the EDB has started depositing the grant into bank accounts specified by parents since the end of February. Since the EDB

has to handle applications from about 900,000 students and the epidemic has also affected the submission of applications by parents or schools as well as the process in the work of the EDB contractor, it may take some time for processing all the applications. The spokesman called on parents to be patient and the bureau will expedite the process with a view to disbursing the grant as soon as possible. As for some parents who have not yet submitted their application forms, the EDB has already announced earlier that the deadline for submission of application forms would be extended to two weeks after the resumption of classes.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (March 17), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 160 patients (76 male and 84 female, aged seven months to 86 years) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria of COVID-19. Appropriate tests have been arranged for the patients.

There are 254 patients under isolation currently. So far, 92 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.

Hong Kong Customs suspends two licences of one money service operator at seven money changers

Following the suspension of the licence of a money service operator (MSO) at six money changers for suspected contravention of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Ordinance (AMLO) last night (March 16), Hong Kong Customs today (March 17) further suspended another MSO licence of the same operator and discovered that the operator was suspected of

operating another money changer without a valid licence. A total of eight money changers are involved.

Customs conducted an immediate investigation following the operation last night. Apart from providing money services at six shops in Sham Shui Po, Mong Kok and Cheung Sha Wan, the MSO was found to have operated another money changer with another MSO licence in Sham Shui Po.

Customs officers further issued another notice in writing to the MSO this morning to suspend its licence involved with immediate effect. Customs has also reminded the MSO to process the related outstanding transactions and payments in an appropriate manner.

Including the MSO licence at six money changers, two licences of the concerned MSO at a total of seven money changers have all been suspended by Customs.

The MSO was suspected to have violated the licensing requirements under the AML0 and have failed to take all reasonable measures to mitigate money laundering and terrorist financing risks, and consequently can no longer be a fit and proper person to operate a money service.

Customs is now investigating the case according to the AML0.

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that the MSO was suspected to have operated another money changer without a valid licence in Sham Shui Po. Customs is carrying out the investigation.

Customs reiterates that the department has all along been enforcing the monitoring work of MSOs and conducting compliance regulations and investigations. All licensed money service operators should comply with the requirements of the AML0. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for seven years. Consumers are reminded to procure service from licensed money service operators. The register of licensees is accessible from the website of Customs' Money Service Operators Licensing System at eservices.customs.gov.hk/MSOS/wsrh/001s1?request_locale=en.

Also, MSOs must comply with the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) when providing money services to customers. Customs will continue to take appropriate enforcement measures if a violation of the TDO is found.

Members of the public may report any suspected violations of the AML0 or the TDO to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).