

Access to Ruttonjee Hospital from Wan Chai Road to reopen tomorrow

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Ruttonjee Hospital announced today (March 16) the reopening of the entrance adjacent to No 55 Wan Chai Road upon completion of construction of barrier-free access to improve convenience and comfort.

The spokesman of Ruttonjee Hospital said works to provide new facilities, including a lift and an escalator, have been completed and the facilities will be put into use tomorrow (March 17) at 6.30am.

Communication with the public on the reopening of the entrance has been made with neighbouring residents, hospital patient groups, Wan Chai District Council and government departments. Notices to promulgate details of the arrangement are also displayed in hospital common areas. The hospital would like to apologise to the public for any inconvenience caused during closure of the access point for carrying out the construction works.



EPD convictions in January

Twenty-seven convictions were recorded in January 2020 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD).

Three of the convictions were under the Noise Control Ordinance, one was under the Ozone Layer Protection Ordinance, 15 were under the Public

Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, one was under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, four were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and three were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

One company was fined \$40,000, which was the heaviest fine in January, for importing or exporting ozone-depleting substances without a licence.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Monday, March 16, 2020 is 107.5 (same as last Saturday's index).

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, March 14, 2020 was 107.5 (up 0.4 against last Friday's index).

Transcript of remarks by SCMA on second batch of chartered flights to bring back Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei

The following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Patrick Nip, this morning (March 16) at a media session at the Central Government Offices on the sending of the second batch of chartered flights by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government to bring back Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei.

Reporter: For next Tuesday, that means you will take full two months for the second batch of chartered flights to take back the people in Hubei, is that too little too late? My second question is about the local quarantine facilities, with people around the world, especially in America and Europe, all trying to rush back, and on Tuesday everybody coming back will need to be quarantined. Are there enough quarantine facilities to house that many people?

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: Thank you very much for your two questions. Actually your second question also pointed out the difficulties or challenges we are facing in arranging Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei to return to Hong Kong. As I said before, on the very first day we received requests for assistance, we have already started planning for

their return and we took into account the epidemic situation in the Mainland and Hong Kong, our quarantine facility capacity as well as the impacts on our healthcare system, etc. At the right time, we kick-started the first batch of operation on the 4th and 5th of March. Right after the completion of the first operation, we have started the preparation for the second batch of operation. We have done whatever we can and whatever possible to take as many as possible Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei back to Hong Kong. But I hope you would appreciate that in arranging these operations, we have to take into account the situation in the Mainland and Hong Kong, all the challenges in the logistical arrangements – how to reduce the public health and cross-infection risks, the quarantine facility capacity and also the impacts on the healthcare system, etc.

Regarding your question about the capacity of our quarantine centres, at present we have about 700 quarantine places available. I think by next Tuesday, the first batch of returnees from Hubei will have completed their 14 days of quarantine and will leave the quarantine centre. In devising the second batch of operation, we have already taken into account, and actually assessed very carefully, our quarantine centre capacity. Of course, the epidemic situation worldwide is changing very rapidly. That's why we have to monitor very closely and act very prudently. We hope that we could plan the operation in detail, execute it smoothly, and have sufficient quarantine facilities to quarantine these returnees. We will continue to monitor the situation and ensure that there will be sufficient quarantine places, especially reserving for those who are close contacts of confirmed cases and who are required to stay in quarantine centres.

Reporter: Can I confirm with you that other than next Tuesday, there are also some chartered flights on the coming Wednesday? My second question concerns the infection and quarantine facilities, because there is basically only one infected, out of the 400 returned evacuees from Wuhan, would you in future consider sending some of them for home quarantine as the risk is relatively manageable? Would this second batch of evacuees place much pressure on the existing quarantine sites? There are some parties suggesting using some of the airports in the other parts of Hubei, is the talk going on? Is it feasible? Would you look into that?

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: As regards to your first question, the earliest time for the departure of the second batch of chartered flights would be next Tuesday. As regards the number of flights and the days of operation, it very much depends on the final outcome of registration. When we confirm the final number of returnees, we will then allocate sufficient number of flights and know the number of days to implement the operation.

Regarding your second question on quarantine facilities and quarantine requirements, for the returnees from Hubei, same as the first batch, they would be transferred to the quarantine centres for 14 days of quarantine. This is because Hubei, particularly Wuhan, has been an infected area, and these returnees have been staying there for a considerable period of time. For prudence's sake and for controlling the public health risks, I think it is appropriate to make such arrangements. Of course, we need to continue to

monitor the situation and seek the experts' advice as regards the level of risks and also the most appropriate quarantine measures for various groups. The situation is changing and we have to monitor closely and to base the measures on science and public health experts' advice.

On your third question, we have been considering all possibilities, including airports in the western part of Hubei Province and other transport means, but based on the experience of the first batch of operation, we have come to the conclusion that using the Wuhan Tianhe International Airport as the base is the most operationally feasible and efficient, and in terms of managing risks, it would be the most appropriate means. After the completion of the second batch of operation, we will of course review the situation and consider the best way forward.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

Government announces fee for persons staying in temporary accommodation from March 17

A Government spokesman announced today (March 16) that persons staying in temporary accommodation provided by the Government will be charged a daily fee of \$200 for accommodation and meal arrangements from March 17 (Tuesday).

Starting from midnight on February 8, 2020, the Department of Health, with reference to the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap 599C), has requested all people entering Hong Kong from the Mainland or those who have been to the Mainland in the past 14 days preceding arrival in Hong Kong (except for Hubei Province) to stay at home or other accommodation for a 14-day compulsory quarantine period, the spokesman said. In general, Hong Kong residents will stay at home or other dwelling places arranged by themselves for quarantine. The Government will also provide them with information on local private guesthouses or hotels for reference. If Hong Kong residents are unable to arrange accommodation locally, the Government will arrange for them to undergo quarantine at one of the temporary accommodation sites, namely Tso Kung Tam Outdoor Recreation Centre, Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and Lady MacLehose Holiday Village.

Since the implementation of the compulsory quarantine arrangement, attendance of more than 700 has been recorded at the above three temporary accommodation sites provided by the Government. As the occupancy rates of the three temporary accommodation sites are already close to their maximum capacity, it is expected that the temporary accommodation sites will be insufficient to meet the needs of all Hong Kong residents returning from the

Mainland. It is therefore necessary for the Government to reserve temporary accommodation for those in genuine need.

At the same time, the Government is aware of suspected cases of people abusing the temporary accommodation. For example, some Hong Kong residents frequently travelled between the Mainland and Hong Kong after the compulsory quarantine arrangement took effect on February 8, and stayed in temporary accommodation repeatedly. Some Hong Kong residents, despite having local residences, still insisted staying in temporary accommodation. In view of the situation, the Government will, from March 17, charge persons staying in temporary accommodation in order to combat abuse of the facilities and reserve places for people with genuine need.