

Latest arrangements for HAD services

To align with the implementation of targeted measures to reduce social contact and other infection control measures as well as gradually resume more public services by the Government in an orderly manner, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) announced today (February 29) the latest arrangements for its services from March 2 (Monday). The details are listed below.

The operation of the HAD's enquiry hotline (2835 2500) will return to normal, with operating hours between 9am and 7pm from Monday to Friday.

The Home Affairs Enquiry Centres (HAECs) (except for the Sham Shui Po HAEC, which closed earlier for maintenance works) will continue to be open between 10am and 5pm from Monday to Friday (between 10am and 5pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only for the HAEC in Mui Wo). The service to administer declarations or oaths/affirmations for private use will be available.

The hotline (2835 1535) and service counter of the Estate Beneficiaries Support Unit will operate from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm from Monday to Friday.

The multi-purpose halls of all community halls and community centres are open to organisations with approved bookings. However, there will be limits on the number of participants for activities to be held in order to ensure that appropriate social distancing can be maintained among them.

The services provided by the Office of the Licensing Authority remain normal.

LegCo Panel on Financial Affairs meeting

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

The Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Financial Affairs will hold a meeting at 9am on Monday (March 2) in Conference Room 1 of the LegCo Complex.

CS visits quarantine centre in Lei Yue Mun (with photos)

The Chief Secretary for Administration and Chairman of the Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, today (February 29) visited Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village to inspect the newly developed temporary quarantine facilities that would soon commence operation.

Accompanied by the Director of Architectural Services, Mrs Sylvia Lam, Mr Cheung toured the quarantine units and received a briefing on how the construction team overcame the challenges during the development process, including the special hygiene and safety requirements (e.g. provision of appropriate sanitary fitments) and how the 118 additional units could be completed in less than a month through application of modular integrated construction method.

In view of the development of the epidemic, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government decided in early February to add new quarantine units on the vacant land in the Village. The construction work started on February 3 and completed on February 27, involving more than 1 900 man-day of on-site management staff and over 9 000 man-day of construction workers.

Mr Cheung highly commended the professionalism upheld and demonstrated by colleagues involved in the construction project and expressed his gratitude for their relentless efforts to complete the new units within an extremely short period. He also expressed his warmest gratitude to Civil Aid Service for fulfilling their pledge to "Provide Emergency Relief, Serve the Community" in managing the quarantine centres properly for the Government and safeguarding the community at large.

He stressed that quarantine centres played an indispensable role in the fight against the epidemic since they could both protect the well-being of people undergoing mandatory quarantine and help reduce the risk of infection among the public, preventing major outbreak in the community.

Mr Cheung added that the Steering Committee on Anti-epidemic Fund under his chairmanship held the first meeting earlier this week. Relevant bureaux and departments were pressing with full steam ahead to roll out the various support and relief measures to address the pressing needs of the local enterprises and members of the public. He called on all quarters of society to continue to join hands in the fight against the epidemic.

Government is currently operating five quarantine centres. According to the existing measures implemented by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, patients suspected to be infected by COVID-19 will be admitted to hospitals for isolation and treatment. As regards asymptomatic close contacts of confirmed cases, they are required to undergo mandatory

quarantine.



Latest arrangements for Labour Department public services

To align with the implementation of targeted measures to reduce social contact and measures for infection control as well as the gradual resumption of more public services from March 2 in an orderly manner as announced by the Government yesterday (February 27), the Labour Department (LD) will resume

its various public services in phases. Details of the latest arrangements for its services with effect from March 2 are as follows:

Branch offices under the Labour Relations Division, job centres and industry-based recruitment centres under the Employment Services Division, Selective Placement Division regional offices, Youth Employment Start, Youth Employment and Training Programme offices, the Employees' Compensation Division, the Supplementary Labour Division, the Registry of Trade Unions and the Employment Agencies Administration will resume their counter services on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The Boilers and Pressure Vessels Division will resume the organisation of the examination for the Certificate of Competency (boiler/steam receiver operator).

Kwun Tong Occupational Health Clinic will be open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and Fanling Occupational Health Clinic on Tuesday and Thursday.

Occupational Medicine Units will contact those who have made service appointments and provide them with the necessary services by phone, and will prepare for the gradual resumption of counter services.

The Job Expo for the Elderly and Rehabilitation Services scheduled to be held in MacPherson Stadium in Mong Kok on March 18 and 19 will be postponed with details to be announced later.

The LD will continue to review the situation and make announcements as appropriate.

For enquiries, members of the public can call the LD's 24-hour enquiry hotline at 2717 1771 (the hotline is operated by 1823), or email the department at enquiry@labour.gov.hk.

[Transcript of remarks by FS \(with photos/video\)](#)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at a media session after attending a radio programme this morning (February 29):

Reporter: Secretary, I mean, some people are calling for a relaxation of property cooling measures, fearing that there would be a re-happening of what happened after SARS, that there will be a huge slump in the property prices. Would you think that would happen again? And second question is regarding ministers donating your wages. Is it as that reporter has suggested or Regina

Ip has suggested – some ministers are not willing to deduct your salary and that's why it's, well, better to maybe donate just one month? And why Community Chest and not other organisations? Some say, shouldn't the money be given to medics who need the most help right now?

Financial Secretary: In considering the way to let our people know that we are willing to ride through this difficult period with them, we thought there are many different ways of doing it. Reducing our monthly salary is one way; making a donation to a charitable organisation is another. We choose the latter because we thought that by donating the salary to a charitable organisation, we would be able to help, although in a very small way, those citizens who are suffering hardship. We chose Community Chest because it is a neutral organisation, and also the Secretary for Labour and Welfare has liaised with the Community Chest to ask them to arrange for the whole amount of donation to be distributed to those (worthy) organisations without any deduction.

As to your question about property market cooling measures, we have heard the appeals from some quarters of the community. We have been monitoring the property market very carefully over the years, and in particular over the past 18 months. It seems that this is not the right moment to do any relaxation. We do not want the market to misinterpret the message of the Government, and we certainly do not want to see speculative activities in the property market.

Your question about comparing the current property market situation with that during the SARS period – the environments are very different. At that time, back in 1997, in one single year the number of transactions was as high as about 160,000 transactions. In recent years, after the additional cooling measures introduced back in 2013, the yearly transactions have been in the order of close to 60,000 only. So the number of buyers rushing into the market at all-time peak was comparatively small, hence the happening of negative equity would not be in a similar situation as before if there were a downward adjustment in the market. Also, at that time the mortgage ratio was quite generous, usually 80 to 90 per cent. But now the mortgage ratio is more stringent, and for new property mortgage, the mortgage ratio is less than 50 per cent (of the property value). So if there were a downward adjustment in the property price, the occurrence of negative equity would be much smaller. Thirdly, the employment situation now and then was also different. At that time, the unemployment rate was as high as over 8 per cent; now it's about 3.4 per cent, although the unemployment rate unavoidably will go up. But the situation is quite different and we are working very hard trying to support our businesses in order to safeguard jobs. Also, the supply situation in the property market is very different. At that time there was a policy of 85,000 units a year, inclusive of both public and private housing. At that time, even, say for example, Home Ownership Scheme supply was high. But now, although we have been working very hard in terms of increasing land supply and housing supply, the excessive supply situation is non-existent. So, taking all these factors into consideration, we are of the view that a sharp, drastic, off-the-cliff type of downward adjustment in the property market is quite unlikely. But of course we need to remain very vigilant because both

external and internal situations can change very quickly. We will continue to monitor the situation to decide on the appropriate next step.

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

