

Update on latest MERS situation in Saudi Arabia

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (February 25) closely monitoring 19 additional cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by Saudi Arabia from December 1 last year to January 31 this year. The CHP again urged the public to pay special attention to safety during travel, taking due consideration of the health risks in the places they visit.

According to the WHO, the 19 additional cases involve 12 male and seven female patients aged 27 to 85, with 16 of them having underlying illnesses. Among them, two had exposure to camels and consumed camel milk, three were health care workers, six had contact with previously confirmed patients and eight have passed away.

According to the latest information, 2 519 cases have been reported to the WHO (with 866 deaths), including 2 300 in 10 Middle East countries comprising 2 121 in Saudi Arabia, 91 in the United Arab Emirates, 28 in Jordan, 24 in Oman, 22 in Qatar, six in Iran, four in Kuwait, two in Lebanon, and one each in Yemen and Bahrain.

"We will maintain close communication with the WHO and relevant health authorities," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"As countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time, travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had a history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients," the spokesman said.

"Scientific evidence shows that camels are reservoirs for MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through nasal and eye discharge and faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus may also be found in the raw organs and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best protection is to practise good hygiene and avoid direct contact with all of these," the spokesman added.

From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involve patients with a history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV.

Travellers to affected areas should maintain vigilance, adopt appropriate health precautions and take heed of personal, food and

environmental hygiene. The public may visit the MERS page of the [CHP](#) and its [Travel Health Service](#) to learn more about MERS statistics in [affected areas](#). The public should also refer to the CHP's [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#) and the WHO's [latest news](#) for more information and health advice. Tour leaders and tour guides operating overseas tours are advised to refer to the CHP's [health advice on MERS](#).

External Merchandise Trade Statistics for January 2020

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (February 25) the external merchandise trade statistics for January 2020. In January 2020, the values of Hong Kong's total exports and imports of goods both recorded year-on-year decreases, at 22.7% and 16.4% respectively.

In January 2020, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 22.7% over a year earlier to \$269.4 billion, after a year-on-year increase of 3.3% in December 2019. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 16.4% over a year earlier to \$300.0 billion in January 2020, after a year-on-year decrease of 1.9% in December 2019. A visible trade deficit of \$30.6 billion, equivalent to 10.2% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in January 2020.

Comparing the three-month period ending January 2020 with the preceding three months on a seasonally adjusted basis, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 4.4%. Meanwhile, the value of imports of goods decreased by 2.2%.

Analysis by country/territory

Comparing January 2020 with January 2019, total exports to Asia as a whole went down by 21.0%. In this region, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular Japan (-28.2%), Malaysia (-23.6%), the mainland of China (the Mainland) (-21.4%), Taiwan (-21.3%), Thailand (-19.8%), Vietnam (-19.7%) and Singapore (-18.8%).

Apart from destinations in Asia, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations in other regions, in particular the United Kingdom (-37.4%), the USA (-33.0%) and Germany (-19.4%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular the Mainland (-25.1%), the USA (-16.6%), Malaysia (-15.1%) and Japan (-4.9%). Concurrently, increases were recorded in the values of imports from Vietnam (+20.5%) and the United Kingdom (+14.9%).

Comparing the three months ending January 2020 with the three months ending January 2019, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular the USA (-26.1%), Japan (-19.4%), Thailand (-17.3%), Germany (-16.1%), Vietnam (-8.7%) and Singapore (-8.0%). The value of total exports to the Mainland also decreased by 0.2%.

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular the USA (-16.8%), Malaysia (-15.0%), the Mainland (-12.3%), Singapore (-1.1%) and the United Kingdom (-0.6%). On the other hand, the value of imports from Vietnam increased by 46.5%.

Analysis by major commodity

Comparing January 2020 with January 2019, decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$19.8 billion or -15.4%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$15.4 billion or -24.2%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$8.7 billion or -24.1%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$5.1 billion or -24.7%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$13.2 billion or -22.1%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$9.6 billion or -31.0%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$6.1 billion or -27.3%). However, an increase was registered in the value of imports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$3.5 billion or 52.0%).

Comparing the three months ending January 2020 with the three months ending January 2019, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$29.4 billion or -13.8%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$10.0 billion or -8.9%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$7.5 billion or -13.2%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of total exports of "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$14.3 billion or 3.7%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$20.4 billion or -19.6%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$18.5 billion or -9.5%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$9.8 billion or -22.6%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of imports of "electrical machinery,

apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$12.3 billion or 3.0%).

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that merchandise exports registered a visible year-on-year decline in January 2020, partly distorted by the difference in timing of the Lunar New Year, which fell in late January this year but in early February last year. It would thus be more meaningful to analyse the trade figures for January and February combined, when available, for a clearer picture of the underlying situation, particularly the impact of the coronavirus infection in the region on external trade performance.

Looking ahead, despite some easing in US-Mainland trade tensions lately, the global economic recovery is still fragile and fraught with uncertainties. Of particular concern is the threat of the novel coronavirus infection, which will heavily weigh on regional production and trading activities. Hong Kong's merchandise exports will face a very austere external trading environment in the coming few months. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Further information

Table 1 at the annex presents the analysis of external merchandise trade statistics for January 2020. Table 2 presents the original monthly trade statistics from January 2017 to January 2020, and Table 3 gives the seasonally adjusted series for the same period.

The values of total exports of goods to 10 main destinations for January 2020 are shown in Table 4, whereas the values of imports of goods from 10 main suppliers are given in Table 5.

Tables 6 and 7 show the values of total exports and imports of 10 principal commodity divisions for January 2020.

All the merchandise trade statistics described here are measured at current prices and no account has been taken of changes in prices between the periods of comparison. A separate analysis of the volume and price movements of external merchandise trade for January 2020 will be released in mid-March 2020.

The January 2020 issue of "Hong Kong External Merchandise Trade" contains detailed analysis on the performance of Hong Kong's external merchandise trade in January 2020 and will be available in mid-March 2020. Users can download the publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp230.jsp).

Enquiries on merchandise trade statistics may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section (2) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 5042).

Application arrangements for Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions for 2020

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (February 25) reminded that the online application period for the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions (Admission Scheme) will begin on March 1.

According to the arrangements for the Admission Scheme for 2020 announced by the Ministry of Education (MoE), 122 Mainland higher education institutions (listed in the Annex) will consider admission applications of Hong Kong students based on their results in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, thus exempting them from taking the Joint Entrance Examination for Universities on the Mainland. Candidates sitting for the HKDSE Examination in 2020 are eligible to apply for the Admission Scheme. The MoE has commissioned the Co-Office of the Mainland Chinese Universities and Colleges of the People's Republic of China for the Joint Examinations and Enrolment of the Students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese-Resident Areas and Countries (the Joint Enrolment Office) to accept online applications and conduct admission screenings, and has entrusted the China Education Exchange (Hong Kong) Centre (HKCEEC) on matters such as eligibility vetting and publicity.

Adjustments have been made to the application arrangements for the Admission Scheme for 2020 in view of the latest situation of the COVID-19 outbreak. Unlike the situation in previous years, applicants who have filed their applications online need not attend on-site confirmation this year. Instead, they should submit application materials by mail for eligibility vetting. The online application deadline has been extended to March 31 to assist students in making applications.

Candidates should file their online applications from March 1 to 31 at the website of the Joint Enrolment Office (www.eea.gd.gov.cn) by clicking on "Admission of Hong Kong Students Taking the HKDSE Examination" under the menu of "Application and Examination" and print out the completed application forms. Candidates who have done the online pre-application are required to submit the application materials listed below to the HKCEEC by registered mail or courier before April 30 (based on the postmark date) for eligibility vetting in order to complete the application confirmation process:

(1) A printed copy of the completed online application form personally signed by the candidate;

- (2) A photocopy of the candidate's Hong Kong identity card and valid Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macau Residents or Residence Permit for Hong Kong and Macau Residents, personally signed by the candidate;
- (3) A crossed cheque for HK\$460 (payable to China Education Exchange (Hong Kong) Centre Limited) as the application fee. The Chinese name and application number of the candidate should be written on the back of the cheque; and
- (4) One colour passport photo (in case the candidate is unable to upload a digital photo to the online application system).

Admission Scheme applicants must complete the application confirmation process before proceeding to the admission stage. In addition, candidates may upload their Student Learning Profiles via the online application system during the period from March 1 to June 30 while schools may upload relevant documents for the School Principal Nomination Scheme via the same system from June 1 to 30.

According to the admission procedure for 2020, institutions may arrange interviews/practical exams based on the application information submitted by candidates. Applicants should look out for the institutions' arrangements and announcements. Institutions will announce the admission results after the release of the HKDSE Examination results, and arrange online supplementary enrolment (i.e. offer of surplus admission quotas) based on the enrolment situation. Details of the admission arrangement and enrolment notice will be announced in due course.

A handbook (Chinese version only) jointly published by the EDB, the HKCEEC and Hok Yau Club provides comprehensive information on the Scheme and pursuing studies on the Mainland, including information on all institutions participating in the Scheme, the programmes offered, strategy on programme choices, and accounts of experiences by graduates of Mainland universities. The handbook was distributed to all Secondary 6 students in Hong Kong earlier, and the e-version of the handbook and other details of the Admission Scheme have been uploaded to the EDB's website (www.edb.gov.hk/admissionscheme20).

Furthermore, eligible Hong Kong students enrolled in undergraduate programmes of designated Mainland institutions can apply for means-tested subsidies or non-means-tested subsidies under the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme (MUSSS). Application details for the MUSSS for the 2020/21 academic year will be announced in mid-2020.

February 2020 issue of “Hong Kong

Monthly Digest of Statistics" now available

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) published today (February 25) the February 2020 issue of the "Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics" (HKMDS).

Apart from providing up-to-date statistics, this issue also contains two feature articles entitled "The Profile of Persons Residing in Private Elderly Homes in 2019" and "Road Traffic Accident Statistics in Hong Kong, 2009-2018". Statistics presented in the "Road Traffic Accident Statistics in Hong Kong, 2009-2018" article are based on the data source from the Transport Department.

"The Profile of Persons Residing in Private Elderly Homes in 2019"

A survey was conducted by the C&SD during July to August 2019 to collect the age-sex profile of persons residing in private elderly homes (PEH). Results of the survey together with some other administrative records are used in the General Household Survey to estimate the age-sex profile of the land-based non-institutional population of Hong Kong. This feature article gives a brief account of the results of the 2019 round of Annual Survey on Profile of Inmates of PEH.

For enquiries about this feature article, please contact the Household Statistics and Analysis Section, C&SD (Tel: 2887 5208; email: ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).

"Road Traffic Accident Statistics in Hong Kong, 2009-2018"

Based on the road traffic accident data collected by the Hong Kong Police Force and maintained by the Transport Department, there were 15 935 road traffic accidents in Hong Kong in 2018, involving 19 637 casualties and 25 726 vehicles. This feature article presents the trends of road traffic casualties and accidents for the period from 2009 to 2018, and the characteristics of road users and vehicles involved. It aims to give readers a better understanding about the road traffic accident situation in Hong Kong.

For enquiries about this feature article, please contact the Statistics Section, Transport Department (Tel: 3842 6067; email: rssd@td.gov.hk).

Published in bilingual form, the HKMDS is a compact volume of official statistics containing about 140 tables. It collects up-to-date statistical series on various aspects of the social and economic situation of Hong Kong. Topics include population; labour; external trade; National Income and Balance of Payments; prices; business performance; energy; housing and property; government accounts, finance and insurance; and transport,

communications and tourism. For selected key statistical items, over 20 charts depicting the annual trend in the past decade and quarterly or monthly trend in the recent two years are also available. Users can download the Digest free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp460.jsp?productCode=B1010002).

Enquiries about the contents of the Digest can be directed to the Statistical Information Dissemination Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 4738; email: gen-enquiry@censtatd.gov.hk).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Tuesday, February 25, 2020 is 107.4 (down 0.2 against yesterday's index).