

Government issues Red Outbound Travel Alert on Korea

In view of the health risks arising from the Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in Korea, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government today (February 24) issued a Red Outbound Travel Alert (OTA) on the country.

A Government spokesman said, "In view of the persistent and rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Korea and the close contacts between Hong Kong and Korea, the Government has decided to issue the Red OTA on Korea based on public health considerations. Red OTA urges the public planning to travel to Korea to adjust travel plans and avoid non-essential travel."

For those who are already there, they should –

- pay attention to announcements by local authorities;
- put on a surgical mask all the time;
- avoid unnecessary visits to healthcare facilities and crowded places;
- avoid close contact with persons with fever or respiratory symptoms;
- wear a surgical mask and inform the hotel staff or tour escort and seek medical advice at once if experiencing a fever or cough; and
- perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes; after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs; or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing.

If it is unavoidable to travel to Korea, the public should pay close attention to the latest situation of COVID-19 and the corresponding travel health advice issued by the Department of Health (DH). After returning to Hong Kong, consult a doctor promptly if experiencing a fever or other symptoms, take the initiative to inform the doctor of any recent travel history and any exposure to animals, and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease until 14 days after returning to Hong Kong.

The Food and Health Bureau will closely monitor the situation. Any updates will be issued through the media, the Government's "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html), the DH's webpage (www.gov.hk/ncv) and the Security Bureau's OTA webpage (www.sb.gov.hk/eng/ota). Any enquiries on health information on COVID-19 may be addressed to the DH's hotline at (852) 2125 1122 (operating daily from 8am to midnight).

Hong Kong residents in Korea who need assistance may call the 24-hour hotline of the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit (AHU) of the Immigration Department at (852) 1868 or contact the Chinese Embassy in Republic of Korea (Consular protection hotline: (82) 2755 0572).

In addition, Hong Kong residents are encouraged to use the online Registration of Outbound Travel Information service (www.gov.hk/roti) to register their contact details and itinerary when outside Hong Kong. The information provided allows the DH and AHU of the Immigration Department to disseminate practical information to them through appropriate means, including SMS on mobile phones, on a timely basis when necessary.

Special Emergency Response Allowance Introduced For Frontline Staff Working in High Risk Areas

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) today (February 24) announced the HA Board's approval for Special Emergency Response Allowance (SERA) for staff engaging in high risk duties under Emergency Response Level in response to COVID-19 epidemic.

The HA spokesperson said that the allowance is granted to staff members performing duties in high risk areas and surveillance wards since the activation of Emergency Response Level by HA on January 25.

"It is a token of appreciation and recognition for the intense pressure and extra preparation time for their high risk duties in caring and managing suspected and confirmed patients of COVID-19."

According to the number of days worked in high risk areas, the allowance is set at 20% of the daily basic salary of the staff or \$500 per day, whichever is higher. "The allowance, with retrospective effect from January 25, will be applicable until the lowering of the Emergency Response Level," added the spokesperson.

The HA expresses the deepest gratitude to staff members for their professionalism and dedication in combating the epidemic. "We trusted that with the joint efforts of staff of all disciplines, from frontline to backend support, we can overcome the challenge of the epidemic eventually."

Public service arrangements for FSD's fire protection units

In view of the latest situation, the special work arrangement for government departments has been extended to reduce social contacts and the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the community. The Fire Services Department announced today (February 24) that its fire protection units will continue to provide basic and essential services to members of the public. For enquiries regarding applications for various licences, applications for dangerous goods vehicle inspections, fire service installations acceptance inspections of new buildings and compliance inspections of ventilating systems, processing of building plans, handling of matters relating to building fire safety improvement works, etc., please contact respective case officers directly during office hours for suitable arrangements.

The department has also made appropriate adjustments to its counter services. The Shroff Office and Receipt and Dispatch Counter of the Licensing and Certification Command Headquarters (located on 5/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building) and the Receipt and Dispatch Counters of the Fire Safety Command Headquarters (located on 7/F) and other fire protection units will provide services from 10am to 12.30pm and from 2pm to 4pm from Monday to Friday.

To reduce social contacts and the risk of the spread of the virus, members of the public are encouraged to settle payments electronically as much as practicable. For further details, please refer to the payment methods contained in the payment notice.

For complaints regarding fire hazards or dangerous goods, please call the FSD Complaint Hotline 2723 8787.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (February 24), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 28 patients (12 male and 16 female, aged four 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 97 patients under isolation currently. So far, 17 patients

with the COVID-19 infection 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.

Licensed Guesthouses Subsidy Scheme open for registration

To assist licensed guesthouses to tackle the financial difficulties arising from the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government has established the Licensed Guesthouses Subsidy Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund. Each eligible guesthouse may receive a one-off subsidy of either \$50,000 or \$80,000. The scheme has been open for registration since the approval of the Anti-epidemic Fund by the Legislative Council Finance Committee on February 21. The deadline for registration is March 20.

All guesthouses with a valid guesthouse licence issued under the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance as at February 21, 2020 are eligible for registration. The registration form and guideline can be downloaded from the website of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) under the Home Affairs Department (www.hadla.gov.hk) or obtained from the OLA's office (Address: 10th Floor, 14 Taikoo Wan Road, Taikoo Shing, Hong Kong).

Guesthouse licence holders should submit the completed registration forms together with documentary proof of their bank account to the OLA by post or in person. They can also file the registration forms and supporting documents via fax or email but are required to submit the original registration forms afterwards. The OLA will verify the registration forms upon receipt. Generally, the disbursement of subsidies could be arranged in about 14 working days after the submission of the completed registration form and the supporting document.

Under the Licensed Guesthouses Subsidy Scheme, each eligible guesthouse with one to five licensed guestrooms may receive a one-off subsidy of \$50,000 and those with six or more licensed guestrooms may receive a one-off subsidy of \$80,000.