

End of winter influenza season 2020

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (February 13) announced the end of the winter influenza season. Members of the public are, however, advised to continue to maintain personal, hand and environmental hygiene against respiratory diseases.

"Hong Kong entered the winter influenza season in early January this year. The influenza activity peaked around late January, started to decrease continuously and returned to the baseline level in early February. This season lasted for about five weeks from the week of January 5, to the week ending February 8," said a spokesman for the CHP .

According to the latest surveillance data, the percentage of respiratory specimens that tested positive for seasonal influenza viruses received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch peaked at 18.76 per cent in the week ending January 25 and declined to 5.67 per cent in the week ending February 8. The predominating virus of this influenza season has been influenza A(H1) (around 80 per cent), followed by A(H3) (around 16 per cent), with very few influenza B positive detections. The overall admission rate with a principal diagnosis of influenza in public hospitals also decreased from the peak of 0.91 per 10 000 population to 0.21 per 10 000 population in the same period.

The number of institutional influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks peaked at 65 in the week ending January 18 and decreased to 39 in the week ending January 25. Only five outbreaks were recorded each in the following two weeks after the announcement of the extension of Chinese New Year holidays. A total of 153 outbreaks were recorded from January 5 to February 8, affecting 801 persons. As of yesterday (February 12), two outbreaks had been recorded this week affecting 13 persons.

For adults, 182 cases of influenza-associated admissions to intensive care units or death (113 deaths) were recorded from January 5 to February 12. In 2020, there were six severe paediatric cases (under 18 years old) reported (no deaths). Among them, five had not received seasonal influenza vaccinations for the current season.

As of February 2, about 537 600, 486 800 and 316 800 doses of seasonal influenza vaccine (SIV) had been administered via the Government Vaccination Programme, the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme and the Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) respectively. The total number of doses administered by the above programmes was about 1 341 000 doses, representing an increase of 17 per cent from the figures for the same period in the 2018-19 season.

"Although the winter influenza season has ended, members of the public aged 6 months or above who have not yet received any SIV in the 2019/20 season can still receive it for personal protection against seasonal

influenza. However, persons who have already completed seasonal influenza vaccinations in the 2019/20 season are not recommended to receive any further doses of SIV within the same season.

"Meanwhile, the public should continue to adopt strict personal, hand and environmental hygiene practices against respiratory illnesses and other infectious diseases," the spokesman added.

The public may visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and weekly [Flu Express](#) for more information.

Correctional officer stops person in custody attacking staff

Correctional officers at Stanley Prison stopped a person in custody attacking a correctional officer today (February 13).

At 8.02am, the 37-year-old male person in custody suddenly turned emotional and attacked a correctional officer with his hand inside the ward of the institution hospital. The officer immediately stopped him and called for reinforcement.

During the incident, the officer sustained injury to his arm while the assailant sustained injury to his hand. After treatment by the institution's Medical Officer, neither of them needed to be sent to an outside hospital.

The case has been reported to the Police for investigation.

The assailant was sentenced to imprisonment for the offence of indecent assault.

Appeal for information on missing man in Central District (with photo)

Police today (February 13) appealed to the public for information on a man who went missing in Central District.

LAM Kwok-ying, aged 51, went missing after he left a rehabilitation center on High Street yesterday afternoon (February 12). Staff of his hostel made a report to Police on the same day.

He is about 1.5 metres tall, 48 kilograms in weight and of thin build. He has a pointed face with yellow complexion and short black hair. He was last seen wearing a beige jacket, a white long-sleeved T-shirt, black trousers with pattern of elephants and sports shoes.

Anyone who knows the whereabouts of the missing man or may have seen him is urged to contact the Regional Missing Person Unit of Hong Kong Island on 2860 1040 or 9886 0034 or email to rmpu-hki@police.gov.hk, or contact any police station.



Public hospital daily update on Wuhan-related cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (February 13), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 52 patients (30 male and 22 female, aged 10 months to 91) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria of severe respiratory disease associated with a novel infectious agent. Specimens of the patients concerned have been sent for testing. There are 126 patients under isolation currently.

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.

Banking industry assists small and medium-sized enterprises in overcoming impact of coronavirus outbreak

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

In view of the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) convened a special teleconference of the Banking Sector SME Lending Coordination Mechanism on February 11 to discuss ways for the industry to extend greater support to their small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) customers in light of the latest developments.

Participating banks agreed that the outbreak has resulted in a further wave of difficulties for SMEs, whose cash-flow pressures have increased significantly. The impact has been broad and SMEs from different sectors are affected. In addition to the retail and catering sectors, which are already suffering as a result of the economic downturn, other sectors like import and export and transportation are also affected to varying degrees. In view of this latest development, eight of the participating banks have already introduced measures to support SMEs in response to an earlier call of the HKMA. The remaining two participating banks will launch similar measures shortly. The Coordination Mechanism also noted that some non-participating banks have responded to the HKMA's call by proposing various measures to help their customers ride out this difficult time.

In order to reduce the cash-flow pressures facing SMEs, banks continue to proactively offer to delay repayments or extend loan tenors, and to reduce fees. Some banks also provide unsecured loan products for SMEs to help improve their cash flow and made special arrangements to expedite loan approvals.

Banks have also introduced relief measures targeting specific sectors. For the import and export sector, banks have extended the repayment period of trade financing facilities to align with the prolonged trade cycle as a result of the outbreak and allowed customers to convert trade financing lines into temporary overdraft facilities so that SMEs can manage their cash flow more flexibly. For the transportation sector, banks have offered repayment holidays or principal moratoriums to some affected customers, including taxi and minibus operators, to help them overcome this difficult period.

The Coordination Mechanism also took the opportunity to discuss how banks can help their retail customers. All participating banks have introduced or will shortly introduce measures to relief personal financial difficulties. These include principal moratoriums for residential mortgages

and fee reductions for credit card borrowing. Regarding principal moratoriums for residential mortgages, the HKMA stated at the meeting that while banks should adhere to the supervisory requirement that mortgage loan tenors should not exceed 30 years in normal circumstances, banks may exercise flexibility on a case-by-case basis for customers with special needs.

During the meeting, HKMC Insurance Limited (HKMCI) expressed its support for banks in introducing measures to lessen the impact of the outbreak on SME and personal customers. Because banks allowing extension of loan tenors and trade financing repayment schedules may result in changes to guarantee terms, HKMCI has streamlined procedures to speed up processing of bank applications for revision of loan terms. As for personal mortgages, HKMCI has confirmed that with regard to principal moratoriums or extensions of repayment schedules recently introduced by some banks, it stands ready to be flexible and will allow borrowers using the Mortgage Insurance Programme to apply for these measures to help reduce their repayment burden. It will also look into ways to streamline related procedures and shorten vetting and approval time.

The Coordination Mechanism will continue to closely monitor developments and discuss with banks other appropriate measures to support SME customers should the need arise.

The Coordination Mechanism was convened by the HKMA. Representatives from the Hong Kong Association of Banks, ten major banks active in SME lending, and the HKMCI attended the teleconference.