

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, February 13, 2020 is 107 (up 0.2 against yesterday's index).

Special arrangements for subsidised welfare services and services of Social Welfare Department

In view of the latest situation, the Government has announced that the special work arrangement for government departments will be extended up to and including February 23 in order to reduce social contacts and the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus in the community. A spokesperson for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) today (February 13) announced the special arrangements for the welfare services subsidised by the SWD and its own services from February 17 to March 1.

Details of the special arrangements are as follows:

(1) All aided child care centres, day care centres for the elderly, sheltered workshops, integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres, integrated vocational training centres and day activity centres will suspend their service delivery. These centres will, however, remain open depending on the situation to serve those in special need. Individual service users who have the need for the services mentioned may contact the centres or service units concerned in advance.

(2) Apart from (a) and (j), which will be provided as normal, the other services will be provided on a limited scale as stated below:

- a. All residential care services;
- b. Integrated Family Service Centres (only providing casework service);
- c. Integrated Services Centres (only providing casework service);
- d. Short-term Food Assistance Service;
- e. Integrated Home Care Services (only providing meal, escort, nursing and administration of medicine services);
- f. Enhanced Home and Community Care Services (only providing meal, escort, nursing and administration of medicine services);
- g. Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities (only providing escort, nursing and administration of medicine services);
- h. Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities (only providing escort, nursing and administration of medicine services);

- i. Visiting Medical Practitioner Service for Residential Care Homes;
- j. Hotline services; and
- k. Humanitarian Assistance for Non-refoulement Claimants.

(3) Centre-based services subsidised by the SWD, such as district elderly community centres, neighbourhood elderly centres, social and recreational centres for the disabled, integrated children and youth services centres, children and youth centres and community centres, will not be open to the public to reduce the risk of infection arising from gatherings of people. These centres will, however, provide services on a limited scale (such as meal services provided by elderly centres).

(4) For other services not covered by (1) to (3) above, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating them may decide whether to continue to provide them under their respective Funding and Service Agreements having regard to their circumstances.

These arrangements should continue up to and including March 1, except for aided child care centres which will basically suspend their service delivery as stated above up to and including March 15. NGOs should keep their clients informed of their specific arrangements.

Regarding the SWD's own services, while departmental hotline services and services of Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home will be in operation as normal, other services such as Integrated Family Service Centres, Family and Child Protective Services Units and Social Security Field Units will only be provided on a limited scale (e.g. groups and programmes, as well as extended hours service, will be suspended). To reduce the risk of infection arising from gatherings of people, service users are advised to contact the staff of the service units by telephone in advance, so that interviews can be scheduled as appropriate. Members of the public may call the hotline number 2343 2255 for enquiries.

Postal services to Canada return to normal

Hongkong Post announced today (February 13) that, as advised by the postal administration of Canada, all mail delivery services (including Speedpost) to the areas with the following postcodes have returned to normal.

Postcodes
A0B XXX, A0C XXX, A0G XXX, A0H XXX, A0K XXX, A0N XXX, A1V XXX, A2A XXX, A5A XXX

Sick person in custody dies in public hospital

A sick 49-year-old male person in custody at Stanley Prison died in a public hospital today (February 13).

The person in custody suffered from asthma, diabetes mellitus and liver cirrhosis. He required continuous medical care and follow-up at an institution hospital and the public hospital. On January 29, he was sent to the public hospital for further treatment due to physical discomfort. During his hospitalisation, his condition deteriorated and he was certified dead at 1.16am today.

The case has been reported to the Police. A death inquest will be held by the Coroner's Court.

The person in custody was sentenced to imprisonment for the offence of trafficking in a dangerous drug in July 2016.

SED on class resumption and cross-boundary students

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, at a media session at the Central Government Offices today (February 13):

Reporter: Would like to ask about the cross-boundary students since last time you have said that approaching March, you will have more concrete measures in terms of cross-boundary students. Do you have any more concrete measures by now since the suspension period has been extended to March 16? For example, would cross-boundary students be staying in the Mainland for a longer period compared to local students even schools resume. Or even some suggested that an exemption for cross-boundary students to come back to Hong Kong to go to schools, could it be possible or the bureau has any thoughts on that? And secondly, this time the suspension is for two weeks, what is the basis of the considerations of the bureau, like why not longer for example four weeks since we have already endured a two-week extension? And lastly, it's about DSE, last time you mentioned that the decision would be made in late February, since many students voiced over to the bureau to an early announcement and since classes have been suspended for another two weeks. Is

it that the bureau implies to follow plan B? Is it to postpone the examination and is it still going to be announced in late February? Thank you.

Secretary for Education: For the HKDSE (Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination), we are still doing an assessment basically we have to consider the development of the epidemic and also all the preparatory work of the HKEAA (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority) in conducting the examination. So we will still maintain that we will make the final decision by the end of this month to decide whether we will choose option A or option B.

For cross-boundary students, of course they are also Hong Kong students so we have to consider their interests as well, but when we decide whether we will resume classes we will have to make sure that it's safe for all students to do so, as well as the impact of having the cross-boundary students coming over to Hong Kong to attend classes. It will also depend on the situation at that time of the epidemic both in Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Now we have to consider different options including whether they would come at the same time and whether they would have further extension of their stay in Shenzhen before they come back. But it all depends on when we could resume classes, so we are still considering different options and have not made any final decision yet.

Regarding the period of extension, we have to balance the interests of the students as well as the needs of society. We all know that, in view of the epidemic, it's not really safe now to resume classes and that's why we suspended classes. And deciding on the period of the extension for suspension, we have to balance the needs of the students that we all want the students to resume classes as soon as possible, and at the same time we also need to balance the needs of the parents that schools are to give them sufficient planning for future activities. If we were asked today, today is February 13, we are announcing that classes will not resume before March 16, that's in fact over a month of a suspension period which I think it's quite a reasonable amount of time for the time being.

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