

FHB responds to media enquiries concerning quarantine centres

In response to media enquiries regarding converting Jao Tsung-I Academy to a quarantine centre, a spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said the following today (February 1):

"In accordance with Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance (2020), in order to strengthen preventive measures and reduce the risk of transmission, the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health requires close contact of the confirmed cases without developing any symptoms to be under observation and quarantined. As such, there is a need for the Government to set up quarantine centres to accommodate these close contacts.

We must stress that those people who have been arranged to stay at quarantine centres are not confirmed or suspected infected patients. Instead, they are close contacts of confirmed cases and have not developed any symptoms.

Currently, the MacLehose Holiday Village and the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village have turned into quarantine centres. As at 12 noon, February 1, nearly 60 accommodation units have been occupied. In light of the needs, the Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp will also be operated as a quarantine centre soon. Some 90 units are provided in the three quarantine centres.

There is an urgent need for the Government to provide more quarantine facilities as soon as possible. When searching for the sites, the Government has thoroughly considered whether the facilities meet the requirements for a quarantine centre including location, overall facilities (e.g. sanitary and ventilation facilities), environment, the possible impact to the residents nearby as well as their availability for such use within a short period of time. Suitable sites meeting the aforesaid requirements are limited. It is also very difficult to identify suitable facilities as quarantine centres.

Located on the hill, the Jao Tsung-I Academy is relatively distanced from residential area. Its overall facilities, including health and ventilation facilities, meet relevant requirements. The facility can also be converted into a quarantine centre which can commence operation at the soonest. Therefore, the Government considers it suitable for use as a quarantine centre.

The operation of the whole quarantine centre will adopt the mode of independent accommodation with security and healthcare staff on duty round the clock. Transfer service for leaving and entering the centre will be provided to people under quarantine, who will not take part in any community activities. Entry into and departure from the quarantine centre are not allowed without written permission of health personnel. Designated officers

will be responsible for daily care of people staying in quarantine centres. Quarantine centres have well developed quarantine measures to ensure hygienic condition, regular disinfection and proper waste management. The operation of the quarantine centres would also follow the Infection Control Guidelines, including that the staff members of the quarantine centres should adhere to personal infection control measures. In light of the operational needs, the activity area and in-and-out routes of the working staff and those required to be quarantined are segregated in the quarantine centre with a view to safeguarding public health.

As such, we sincerely hope that members of the public could understand the reasons for the Government to use the Jao Tsung-I Academy as a quarantine centre. The Government will ensure that all quarantine centres will comply with the stringent operational requirements."

Hongkong Post responds to media enquiries

In response to the media enquiries about the mail handling situation of the Air Mail Centre (AMC), Hongkong Post's reply is as follows:

Hongkong Post has made an announcement today that posting and delivery of outbound and inbound Speedpost items will be maintained during the period between February 3 and 8 (Monday to Saturday).

Despite the Government announcement made earlier about the implementation of a special work arrangement for government departments after the Lunar New Year holidays (i.e. from January 29) so as to reduce the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus in the community as far as possible, Hongkong Post has still maintained normal delivery services for inbound Speedpost items to strike a balance between the public needs and the well-being of our staff. We have also arranged our staff to work shifts for mail sorting and delivery and taken initiatives to locate for items with contents declared to be surgical masks for priority delivery.

In general, the AMC only maintains acceptance of inbound mail items during Sundays. Thanks to the unfailing support of our staff, we have arranged for additional manpower and extra working hours for tomorrow (i.e. February 2) to handle and arrange sorting of urgent inward mail items. We will continue to uphold the principle of according a higher priority for surgical masks and arrange for their delivery in the first instance.

We estimate that the number of mail items containing surgical masks accounts for about 25% of inward urgent items pending delivery, i.e. about 3000 items. It is estimated that delivery of these items will complete by next Monday, i.e. February 3.

Latest arrangements on Labour Department public services

In light of the extension of special work arrangements for government employees and the latest development of the novel coronavirus infection, the Labour Department (LD) announced today (February 1) that the LD will provide limited public services between February 3 (Monday) and February 8 (Saturday). Except those provided by the Employment Agencies Administration (EAA), other counter services will remain suspended.

The EAA will provide limited counter services during office hours (from 9am to 1pm and from 2pm to 6.15pm) from Monday to Friday for receiving applications for licence for employment agencies.

Two Occupational Health Clinics and Occupational Medicine Units under the department will remain closed. For those who have made medical clearance appointment with Occupational Medicine Units, please reschedule your appointment through the internet or telephone voice booking system.

The LD will review the situation in due course and announce the arrangements thereafter.

For enquiries, members of the public can call the LD's 24-hour enquiry hotline at 2717 1771 (the hotline is manned by "1823").

Government clarifies rumours about surgical mask supply

A Government spokesman today (February 1) solemnly clarified online rumours about the supply of surgical masks and stressed that the Government is sparing no efforts to increase the supply of surgical masks in Hong Kong.

The spokesman said that the Government is proactively increasing the overall supply of surgical masks through a multi-pronged approach. Measures include (1) sourcing globally; (2) liaising with relevant Mainland authorities to facilitate speedy clearance and delivery to the market; (3) contacting the Mainland suppliers to enhance production of surgical masks for Hong Kong; (4) increasing local production; (5) appealing to private organisations for donations.

The Government will always take the health of Hong Kong people as the first consideration, stressing that all the surgical masks produced and procured will be used to meet local demands. In particular, priorities will be given to healthcare staff and frontline officers.

Concerning a media report which said that surgical masks produced by the Correctional Services Department (CSD) were found in the community, the spokesman said that the CSD had provided surgical masks to some non-governmental organisations before the disease outbreak. It is, therefore, not unusual for people in the community to be using surgical masks produced by the CSD. Owing to keen local demand, the CSD has stopped taking orders other than from the Government Logistics Department (GLD). Surgical masks obtained by the GLD from the CSD will only be distributed to various departments in need. They will not be delivered outside Hong Kong. The Government will follow up in accordance with the law if any public officer is found to have stolen surgical masks.

On media reports about distribution of surgical masks donated by a non-governmental organisation by a political party, the spokesman said that though the Chief Executive is the honorary patron of the non-governmental organisation concerned, the surgical masks involved were not provided by the Government.

The spokesman said that the Government has announced a series of measures to minimise people from gathering and contacting. Given the tight supply of surgical masks, the spokesman appeals to members of the public to go out less and pay attention to personal hygiene to reduce the use of surgical masks.

FEHD maintains normal public service

A spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (February 1) said that during the implementation of special work arrangements for government departments, public services provided by the FEHD, including cleansing, environmental hygiene, pest control, slaughterhouses, public markets, hawker management, burial and cremation, as well as various licensing services will generally continue to remain normal. The Centre for Food Safety will continue its surveillance on food sold in Hong Kong to protect public health and ensure that food for sale is fit for consumption.

The spokesman added, "To reduce the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus in the community, the Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre and the Communication Resource Unit, Centre for Food Safety of the FEHD will continue to be temporarily suspended and their educational and outreaching programmes will be cancelled until further notice."