

Manager of unlicensed guesthouse fined

A man was fined \$8,000 at the Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts today (December 27) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in May this year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), the Home Affairs Department, inspected a suspected unlicensed guesthouse on Tin Kwai Road in Tin Shui Wai. During the inspection, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented a room in the guesthouse on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's record, the guesthouse did not possess a licence under the Ordinance on the day of inspection. The man responsible for managing the premises was charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaeng@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Friday, December 27, 2019 is 106.4 (down 0.1 against Tuesday's index).

Wage and payroll statistics for September 2019

Overall wage and payroll statistics

According to the figures released today (December 27) by the Census and

Statistics Department (C&SD), the average wage rate for all the selected industry sections surveyed, as measured by the wage index, increased by 3.4% in nominal terms in September 2019 over a year earlier.

About 62% of the companies reported increase in average wage rates in September 2019 compared with a year ago. 36% of the companies recorded decrease in average wage rates over the same period. The remaining 2% reported virtually no change in average wage rates.

After discounting the changes in consumer prices as measured by the Consumer Price Index (A), the overall average wage rate for all the selected industry sections surveyed remained virtually unchanged when compared with that in September 2018.

As for payroll, the index of payroll per person engaged for all the industry sections surveyed increased by 3.0% in nominal terms in the third quarter of 2019 over a year earlier.

After discounting the changes in consumer prices as measured by the Composite Consumer Price Index, the average payroll per person engaged decreased by 0.3% in real terms in the third quarter of 2019 compared with a year earlier.

The wage rate includes basic wages and other regular and guaranteed allowances and bonuses. Payroll includes elements covered by wage rate as well as other irregular payments to workers such as discretionary bonuses and overtime allowances. The payroll statistics therefore tend to show relatively larger quarter-to-quarter changes, affected by the number of hours actually worked and the timing of payment of bonuses and back-pay.

Sectoral changes

For the nominal wage indices, year-on-year increases were recorded in all selected industry sections in September 2019, ranging from 2.3% to 4.1%.

For the real wage indices, year-on-year increases were recorded in all selected industry sections in September 2019, ranging from 0.1% to 0.6%, except the manufacturing section and import/export, wholesale and retail trades section where year-on-year decreases of 0.1% and 1.1% were recorded respectively.

The year-on-year changes in the nominal and real wage indices for the selected industry sections from September 2018 to September 2019 are shown in Table 1.

As for the nominal indices of payroll per person engaged, year-on-year increases were recorded in all selected industry sections in the third quarter of 2019, ranging from 0.1% to 4.9%.

For the real payroll indices, year-on-year increases were recorded in most of the selected industry sections in the third quarter of 2019, ranging from 0.1% to 1.5%. Yet, year-on-year decreases ranging from 0.3% to 3.1% were recorded in the import/export and wholesale trades section, retail trade

section, financial and insurance activities section and social and personal services section.

The year-on-year changes in the nominal and real indices of payroll per person engaged for selected industry sections from the third quarter of 2018 to the third quarter of 2019 are shown in Table 2. The quarterly changes in the seasonally adjusted nominal and real indices of payroll per person engaged between the third quarter of 2018 and the third quarter of 2019 are shown in Table 3.

Commentary

A Government spokesman noted that overall nominal wages continued to increase in September 2019 over a year earlier, but at a somewhat decelerated pace as economic conditions worsened further. After discounting for inflation which has been driven up by elevated pork prices, overall real wages remained unchanged from a year earlier.

Payroll per person engaged, which also covers discretionary bonuses and other irregular payments, likewise registered a decelerated year-on-year increase in nominal terms in the third quarter of 2019. Almost all major sectors saw decelerated growth in payroll. In addition to the economic slowdown, the delay in pay adjustment in some subvented organisations, which makes reference to that in civil service pay, has also contributed to the deceleration in overall payroll growth.

The spokesman added that the earnings situation will be subject to even more downward pressure in the near term if the overall economy remains weak. The Government will monitor the developments closely.

Other information

Both wage indices and payroll indices are compiled quarterly based on the results of the Labour Earnings Survey (LES) conducted by the C&SD.

Wage statistics are conceptually different from the payroll statistics. Firstly, wage rate for an employee refers to the sum earned for his normal hours of work. It covers basic wages and other regular and guaranteed allowances and bonuses, but excludes earnings from overtime work and discretionary bonuses, which are however included in payroll per person engaged. Secondly, the payroll index of an industry is an indicator of the simple average payroll received per person engaged in the industry. Its movement is therefore affected by changes in wage rates, number of hours of work and occupational composition in the industry. In contrast, the wage index of an industry is devised to reflect the pure changes in wage rate, with the occupational composition between two successive statistical periods being kept unchanged. In other words, the wage index reflects the change in the price of labour. Thirdly, wage index only covers employees up to the supervisory level (i.e. not including managerial and professional employees), whereas payroll index covers employees at all levels and proprietors actively engaged in the work of the establishment. Because of these conceptual and enumeration differences between payroll and wage statistics, the movements in

payroll indices and in wage indices do not necessarily match closely with each other.

It should also be noted that different consumer price indices are used for compiling the real indices of wage and payroll to take into account the differences in their respective occupation coverage. Specifically, the Composite Consumer Price Index, being an indicator of overall consumer prices, is taken as the price deflator for payroll of workers at all levels of the occupational hierarchy. The Consumer Price Index (A), being an indicator of consumer prices for the relatively low expenditure group, is taken as the price deflator for wages in respect of employees engaged in occupations up to the supervisory level.

Detailed breakdowns of the payroll and wage statistics are published in the "Quarterly Report of Wage and Payroll Statistics, September 2019". Users can download this publication free of charge from the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp210.jsp?productCode=B1050009).

For enquiries on wage and payroll statistics, please contact the Wages and Labour Costs Statistics Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5550 or email: wage@censtatd.gov.hk).

[Update on latest MERS situation in Qatar](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 27) closely monitoring three additional cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by Qatar. 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, this was a cluster affecting three persons aged 32 to 67. The index case is a 67-year-old woman with underlying illnesses who had passed away. The other two cases were identified through contact tracing and both are in a stable condition. Investigations are ongoing.

According to the latest information, 2 497 cases have been reported to the WHO (with 859 deaths), including 2 278 in 10 Middle East countries comprising 2 102 in Saudi Arabia, 88 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 has shown 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](#), MERS statistics in [affected areas](#), 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](#).

[Update on dengue fever](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 27) reported the latest number of dengue fever (DF) cases, and strongly urged the public to maintain strict environmental hygiene, mosquito control and personal protective measures both locally and during travel.

From December 20 to 26, the CHP recorded two imported DF cases. The patients had respectively been to the Philippines (one case) and Thailand (one case) during the incubation period.

As of yesterday (December 26), 197 cases had been recorded this year (including 196 imported cases and one local), as compared with 162 cases recorded in the same period last year. The imported cases were mainly from Thailand (33), Malaysia (27) and the Philippines (25).

The CHP has been closely monitoring the latest DF situation in

neighbouring and overseas areas. DF is endemic in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world. According to the World Health Organization, some Asian countries are experiencing unusually high numbers of DF cases this year. The numbers of cases in some countries were significantly higher than the numbers for the same period in 2018, including Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Separately, according to the Health Commission of Guangdong Province, as of November 30, a total of 5 986 cases had been recorded in Guangdong this year, which was significantly higher than that in the same period last year (3 250 cases). In Taiwan, as of yesterday, 631 cases (including 100 local cases) had been recorded in 2019.

Detailed information on the latest DF situation in Hong Kong as well as neighbouring and overseas countries and areas this year has been uploaded to the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/df_imported_cases_and_overseas_figures_eng.pdf). Members of the public should stay vigilant and carry out effective mosquito prevention and control measures.

â€œ"Apart from [general measures](#), travellers returning from areas affected by DF should apply insect repellent for 14 days upon arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor," a spokesman for the CHP said.

The public should take heed of the following advice on mosquito control:

- Thoroughly check all gully traps, roof gutters, surface channels and drains to prevent blockage;
- Scrub and clean drains and surface channels with an alkaline detergent compound at least once a week to remove any deposited mosquito eggs;
- Properly dispose of refuse, such as soft drink cans, empty bottles and boxes, in covered litter containers;
- Completely change the water of flowers and plants at least once a week. The use of saucers should be avoided if possible;
- Level irregular ground surfaces before the rainy season;
- Avoid staying in shrubby areas; and
- Take personal protective measures such as wearing light-coloured long-sleeved clothes and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or uncovered areas of the body when doing outdoor activities.

DEET-containing insect repellents are effective and the public should take heed of the tips below:

- Read the label instructions carefully first;
- Apply right before entering an area with risk of mosquito bites;
- Apply on exposed skin and clothing;
- Use DEET of up to 30 per cent for pregnant women and up to 10 per cent for children*;

- Apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent; and
- Re-apply only when needed and follow the instructions.

* For children who travel to countries or areas where mosquito-borne diseases are endemic or epidemic and where exposure is likely, those aged 2 months or above can use DEET-containing insect repellents with a DEET concentration of up to 30 per cent.

The public should call 1823 in case of mosquito problems and may visit the following pages for more information: the DF page of the [CHP](#) and the [Travel Health Service](#), the latest [Travel Health News](#), [tips for using insect repellents](#), and the CHP [Facebook Page](#) and [YouTube Channel](#).