

Suspected MERS case reported

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (February 4) reported a suspected case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and again urged the public to pay special attention to safety during travel, taking due consideration of the health risks in the places they visit. The case is detailed below:

Sex	Male
Age	11 months old
Affected area involved	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
High-risk exposure	Nil
Hospital	Princess Margaret Hospital
Condition	Stable
MERS-Coronavirus preliminary test result	Negative

"Travellers to the Middle East should avoid going to farms, barns or markets with camels; avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry; and avoid unnecessary visits to healthcare facilities. We strongly advise 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 Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Locally, the CHP's surveillance with public and private hospitals, with practising doctors and at boundary control points is firmly in place. Inbound travellers and members of the public who recently visited the Middle East and developed fever or lower respiratory symptoms within 14 days will be classified as suspected MERS cases. They will be taken to public hospitals for isolation and management until their specimens test negative for 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 pages of the [CHP](#) and its [Travel Health Service](#), MERS statistics in [affected areas](#), the CHP's [Facebook Page](#) and [YouTube Channel](#), and the World Health Organization'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](#).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Monday, February 4, 2019 is 103.6 (up 0.2 against last Saturday's index).

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, February 2, 2019 is 103.4 (up 0.1 against last Friday's index).

Illegal worker jailed

An Indian illegal worker holding a recognisance form was jailed by Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts on February 2.

During operation "Twilight" on January 31, Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided a restaurant in Tsim Sha Tsui. A female Indian illegal worker, aged 26, was arrested. When intercepted she was working as a dish-washing worker. Upon identity checking, she produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits her from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that she was a non-refoulement claimant. An employer suspected of employing the illegal worker was arrested and the investigation is ongoing.

The illegal worker was charged at Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts on February 2 with taking employment after landing in Hong Kong unlawfully and remaining in Hong Kong without the authority of the Director of Immigration or while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force. She pleaded guilty to the charge and was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an

immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening on vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation, with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threat and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent interference, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

[Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected illegally imported live birds \(with photo\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs seized 60 suspected illegally imported live birds, including 20 live birds suspected to be endangered species, with an estimated market value of about \$600 at Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point on February 2.

During Customs clearance for a 29-year-old incoming male passenger in the afternoon on February 2, the batch of live birds were found in two plastic bags he carried.

The case was handed over to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department for follow-up investigation.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered

species without a licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years.

Under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations, it is an offence to import any bird unless it is accompanied by a valid health certificate. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$25,000.

Members of the public may report any suspected activities of illegal import of live birds to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



Employer fined for late payment of wages

Happy Strong Corporation Limited was prosecuted by the Labour Department (LD) for failing to pay three employees' wages, totalling about \$70,000, within seven days after the expiry of the wage period as required by the Employment Ordinance (EO). The employer was fined \$54,000 after pleading guilty at Eastern Magistrates' Courts today (February 4).

"The ruling helps disseminate a strong message to all employers that they have to pay wages to employees within the time limit stipulated in the EO," an LD spokesman said.

"The LD will not tolerate these offences and will continue to make dedicated efforts in enforcing the law and safeguarding employees' statutory rights," the spokesman added.