

Import of poultry meat and products from Miami-Dade County of State of Florida in US suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (May 21) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Miami-Dade County of the State of Florida in the United States (US), the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the area with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 12 290 tonnes of chilled and frozen poultry meat, and about 1.19 million poultry eggs from the US in the first three months of this year.

â€œThe CFS has contacted the American authority over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the WOAH and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreak. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

LCQ4: Functions and services of public libraries

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Miss Rosanna Law, in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

It is learnt that due to the prevalence of digitisation and changes in the reading habits of members of the public, the number of visits to public libraries and the number of materials on loan have both dropped significantly in recent years, and quite a number of overseas libraries have gradually transformed themselves from conventional institutions for collecting and lending books into diversified spaces functioning as community centres with intelligent services. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information about public libraries for the past two years: (i) the numbers of circulations of physical books, e-books and

multimedia items and their year-on-year rates of change, (ii) the expenditure on purchasing such items and its percentage in the overall library expenditure, (iii) the number of visits, (iv) the number of newly registered users, and (v) the number of readers borrowing physical materials;

(2) whether it has reviewed the functions and services of public libraries to ensure that the allocation of resources can meet the needs of the community; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has drawn on the library models of other cities to push forward the modernisation and transformation of Hong Kong's public libraries in terms of innovative design, application of intelligent technology, community services and so on, as well as to expand their functions and services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Chun-ying is as follows:

Under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), there are 71 static libraries, 12 mobile libraries and 3 self-service library stations that offer round-the-clock services, providing free and comprehensive library services for the public.

In the past 2 years, the number of visits to the libraries increased from 21.49 million in 2023 to 23.83 million in 2024. The number of loans of physical books increased from 28.75 million items to 28.97 million items, while that of multimedia materials increased slightly from 616 000 items to 617 000 items. On the other hand, as more people visited the libraries and borrowed physical books, the number of loans of e-books decreased from 2.56 million items to 2.32 million items. In 2023 and 2024, the number of newly registered readers was 43 000 and 38 000 respectively, while the number of readers who borrowed physical materials was 620 000 and 600 000 respectively.

The expenditure on the acquisition of library materials maintained at about \$100 million in the financial years of 2023-24 and 2024-25, accounting for about 7 per cent of the overall expenditure of the libraries in the respective financial years.

Libraries in different regions have been facing the challenge of declining patronage due to the availability of more free information online. To facilitate the sustainable development of the libraries, the LCSD has implemented the strategic plan of libraries from 2020 to 2025 to enhance existing facilities and library networks; raise public awareness of the physical collection and electronic resources; launch large-scale reading promotion activities to promote reading interests and expand readership; and enhance library services through the application of information technology. The libraries also conduct opinion surveys through annual Reader Liaison Group gatherings to better understand the reading habits and needs of

readers.

At present, the LCSD enhances its library services on various aspects, including planning, library collections, services and application of technology, etc. When planning new library facilities, the LCSD will make reference to the experience of Mainland and overseas libraries, with a view to making a library into a community gathering place. The demographics and needs of different communities will be taken into account when planning the functions, design, services and facilities of libraries to ensure that library services will meet the needs of residents of different age groups in the community. Taking Sham Shui Po Public Library commissioned in 2023 as an example, considering the greater number of young families in the district, a parent-child reading corner and a game wall are specifically provided in its children's library where the facilities are tailor-made for paired reading by young readers and families. A leisure reading area is also set up in the adult library to provide a comfortable reading environment for patrons, and a create • info zone equipped with more multimedia digital service facilities is provided for the youth. Besides, the library also caters for the needs of the elderly in the district by providing desktop video magnifiers in the newspapers and periodicals section to bring convenience to them when reading newspapers and magazines.

On library collections, the LCSD keeps gathering and analysing usage data of its library collections, including both physical and e-books, for understanding changes in reading habits and demands of readers as well as introducing new library materials that meet the needs of the public. With the ever-increasing popularity of e-reading, the libraries continue to enhance its acquisition of e-books, bringing an increase of over 60 per cent in the e-book collection from 330 000 items in 2019 to about 540 000 items currently. The usage of e-books also rose sharply from 960 000 in 2019 to 2.32 million in 2024.

Apart from the provision of book lending services in libraries, the LCSD libraries also offer outreaching services from time to time, such as block loan of library materials in the community to assist individual community organisations and housing estates with such demand in establishing community libraries for providing book services to their members or residents. Currently, 197 community libraries have been set up across the territory, including two located inside the Community Living Rooms in Sham Shui Po.

In addition, the libraries launch large-scale territory-wide reading activities and hold other activities such as book exhibitions, talks, workshops and pop-up libraries during major events organised by the LCSD to promote library collections and e-reading, with a view to extending the reach to readers.

Like public libraries in other advanced cities, the LCSD strives to enhance library services through the application of new technology, and is developing a new Smart Library System. As an integrated library system, the new system supports the daily operation of all public libraries, including collection management, borrowing and return of library materials and online electronic resources, etc, thereby providing greater convenience to the

public in using library services. Thank you, President.

Online auction of vehicle registration marks to be held from June 5 to 9

The Transport Department (TD) today (May 21) said that the next online auction of vehicle registration marks (VRMs) will be held from noon on June 5 (Thursday) to noon on June 9 (Monday) through the auction platform E-Auction (e-auction.td.gov.hk). Interested bidders can participate in the online auction only after they have successfully registered as E-Auction users.

A spokesman for the TD said, "A total of 150 Ordinary VRMs will be available at this online public auction. The list of VRMs (see Annex) has been uploaded to the E-Auction website. Applicants who have paid a \$1,000 deposit to reserve the Ordinary VRM for auction should also register as an E-Auction user in advance in order to participate in the online bidding, including placing the first bid at the opening price of \$1,000. Otherwise, the VRMs reserved by them may be bid on by other interested bidders at or above the opening price. Auctions for VRMs with HK or 'XX' as a prefix, special VRMs and personalised VRMs will continue to be carried out through physical auctions by bidding paddles, and their announcement arrangements remain unchanged."

Members of the public participating in the online bidding should take note of the following important points:

(1) Bidders should register in advance as an E-Auction user by "iAM Smart+" equipped with the digital signing function; or by using a valid digital certificate and an email address upon completion of identity verification. Registered "iAM Smart" users should provide their Hong Kong identity card number, while non-Hong Kong residents who are not "iAM Smart" users should provide the number of their passport or other identification documents when registering as E-Auction users.

(2) Bidders are required to provide a digital signature to confirm the submission and amount of the bid by using "iAM Smart+" or a valid digital certificate at the time of the first bid of each online bidding session (including setting automatic bids before the auction begins) to comply with the requirements of the Electronic Transactions Ordinance.

(3) If a bid is made in respect of a VRM within the last 10 minutes before the end of the auction, the auction end time for that particular VRM will be automatically extended by another 10 minutes, up to a maximum of 24 hours.

(4) Successful bidders must follow the instructions in the notification email

issued by the TD to log in to the E-Auction within 48 hours from the issuance of email and complete the follow-up procedures, including:

- completing the Purchaser Information for the issuance of the Memorandum of Sale of Registration Mark (Memorandum of Sale); and
- making the auction payment online by credit card, Faster Payment System (FPS) or Payment by Phone Service (PPS). Cheque or cash payment is not accepted in the E-Auction.

(5) A VRM can only be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser. Relevant information on the Certificate of Incorporation must be provided by the successful bidder in the Purchaser Information of the Memorandum of Sale if the VRM purchased is to be registered under the name of a body corporate.

(6) Successful bidders will receive a notification email around seven working days after payment has been confirmed and can download the Memorandum of Sale from the E-Auction. The purchaser must apply for the VRM to be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser within 12 months from the date of issue of the Memorandum of Sale. If the purchaser fails to do so within the 12-month period, in accordance with the statutory provision, the allocation of the VRM will be cancelled and a new allocation will be arranged by the TD without prior notice to the purchaser.

The TD has informed all applicants who have reserved the Ordinary VRMs for this round of auction of the E-Auction arrangements in detail by post. Members of the public may refer to the E-Auction website or watch the tutorial videos for more information. Please call the E-Auction hotline (3583 3980) or email (e-auction-enquiry@td.gov.hk) for enquiries.

LCQ12: Licensing Examination of Medical Council of Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Kingsley Wong and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

There are views that the content of the Licensing Examination (LE) administered by the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK) is too difficult and its syllabus far exceeds clinical needs, resulting in low pass rates. However, there are also views pointing out that despite its high level of difficulty, LE can ensure that passing candidates are capable of coping with the medical environment in Hong Kong. In addition, a member of the public has

relayed to me that he had requested past LE examination papers and the relevant examination information from the Department of Health (DH), but DH pointed out that such information was in the possession of MCHK, which refused to disclose it. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied if the authorities have the power to access or require MCHK to submit and disclose information, including the examination papers and marking criteria of LE; whether DH has reviewed the LE examination papers and kept full records of the relevant examination materials; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there have been criticisms that the inclusion of a large number of questions on specialties and rare diseases in LE is a deliberate attempt to create difficulties for overseas candidates, how the authorities ensure that the difficulty of LE examination papers is at a reasonable level while respecting the professional autonomy of MCHK; whether the Director of Health or his/her representative, as an ex officio member of MCHK, has participated in the design of LE examination papers, including giving opinions on the scope and questions of the examination; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as there are views that MCHK's non-disclosure of past LE examination papers undermines candidates' learning and makes it difficult for the community to fairly assess the difficulty of the examination papers, whether the authorities and MCHK will explore the disclosure or restricted disclosure of past LE examination papers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as there are views pointing out that the "Useful Resources" on MCHK's current website are too simplistic and the number of "Sample Questions" available is insufficient, whether it knows if MCHK will enhance its website and introduce measures to further facilitate overseas candidates in preparing for LE?

Reply:

President,

In response to the questions raised by the Hon Kingsley Wong, after consulting the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK), the consolidated reply is set out below.

The registration and examination of healthcare professionals are matters pertaining to the professional standard and conduct of the sector. Their regulation is administered by the statutory boards or councils of the professions. The regulatory authorities must be accountable to the public when discharging their duties, ensuring Hong Kong's medical professional standard while protecting the health of citizens and safeguarding the overall interest of society. The Government's role is to ensure, through effective administrative arrangements, that the boards and councils of the respective professions perform their regulatory duties in accordance with their

statutory functions and powers.

The MCHK is an independent statutory body established under the Medical Registration Ordinance (MRO) (Cap. 161) empowered to handle registration and disciplinary regulation of medical practitioners in Hong Kong. Section 7 of the MRO provides that the MCHK shall set a Licensing Examination (LE), the passing of which shows the achievement of a standard acceptable for registration as a medical practitioner. The conduct of LE by the MCHK aims to ensure that those who wish to register as medical practitioners in Hong Kong after having received medical training elsewhere have attained a professional standard comparable to that of the local medical graduates, thereby safeguarding the quality of healthcare services and public health. The MCHK will regularly review the contents of the LE, and provides information to enable non-locally trained doctors who intend to sit for the LE to understand the format and contents of the LE.

The LE consists of three parts: namely Part I Examination in Professional Knowledge, Part II Proficiency Test in Medical English and Part III Clinical Examination. The MCHK adopts a number of measures in organising the LE to ensure that its level and assessment standards are comparable to those of the medical examinations of the two universities in Hong Kong. Among them, the MCHK has set up different sub-committees responsible for matters related to the LE, including organising the LE, approving examination questions and maintaining a database of examination questions, considering and deciding on the eligibility of applicants to sit for the LE, and processing candidates' applications for review. To ensure representativeness, the sub-committees include representatives from public and private healthcare institutions, the medical schools and the Department of Health. In addition, the two medical schools in Hong Kong will appoint local and non-local medical experts with profound knowledge in relevant disciplines as examiners for each part of the LE to ensure that the quality and level of the examination meet the requirements. These experts will also offer recommendations to further refine the examination contents and arrangements. For Part I Examination in Professional Knowledge, the questions are chosen from the database of examination questions at comparable level as the medical examination of the two medical schools, hence not suitable for publication.

To enhance the transparency of the LE and to increase candidates' understanding of the LE, the MCHK set up an information portal on the LE in October 2018 (leip.mchk.org.hk). Relevant information of the LE, such as examination formats, sample questions, list of suggested readings, videos of the Clinical Examination and general information about the LE, is available in the LE Information Portal for reference by the public and non-locally trained doctors who intend to seek registration as medical practitioners in Hong Kong. The MCHK reviews and enhances the online portal from time to time, including increasing the number of sample questions, to facilitate candidates in preparing for the LE.

LCQ17: Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

Launched by the Government in late 2016, the Pilot Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions (the Scheme) aims to enhance the current society-based registration arrangement of healthcare professions under the principle of professional autonomy, and ensure the professional competency of relevant healthcare professionals. However, there are views pointing out that the implementation of the Scheme has been slow and lacks transparency. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will assess the effectiveness of the Scheme and submit reports on the Scheme; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the Government will provide professional bodies intending to apply for the Scheme with specific reference materials on accreditation applications to enhance the fairness and transparency of the Scheme; if so, of the details (including the timetable); if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether the Government will establish a formal appeal channel or re-application mechanism for the Scheme, and explain the reasons to professional bodies whose applications are rejected, and proactively assist them in improving their standards in order to meet the accreditation requirements in future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as the Government has indicated that the Scheme will serve a basis for it to study how to formulate a statutory registration regime for relevant accredited professions, of the progress and timetable of the relevant work; and

(5) as it is learnt that the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care of the United Kingdom has categorised certain types of psychologists (e.g. counselling psychologists, clinical psychologists, and educational psychologists) into one profession (i.e. "Practitioner Psychologists") and established a registration system for them, whether the Government will consider drawing on such practice and standardise the categorisation of local psychologists as practitioner psychologists for professional registration?

Reply:

President,

The Government introduced the Pilot Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions (AR Scheme) in end-2016 to optimise the society-based registration regulatory regime, ensure professional standards of healthcare professionals and enhance information transparency, thereby facilitating the selection of qualified service providers by the public. The Jockey Club School of Public Health and Primary Care of the Chinese University of Hong Kong has been appointed as the Accreditation Agent of the AR Scheme to carry out accreditation procedures for participating healthcare professional bodies. Relevant healthcare professional bodies will only be granted accreditation status upon passing the accreditation assessment.

The reply in response to the question raised by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen is as follows:

(1) to (3)

AR Scheme

The AR Scheme is operated according to the principle of "One Profession, One Professional Body, One Register". To ensure effective governance structures in professional bodies and professional standards of their members, the Accreditation Agent has established accreditation standards to be met by professional bodies on: (1) governance, (2) operational effectiveness, (3) standards for registrants, (4) educational and training requirements, and (5) management of the register. The Accreditation Agent will review the accreditation standards from time to time, taking into consideration relevant researches, evidence, policies, regulations and developments in healthcare professions, and consult relevant stakeholders. Accreditation standards of the AR Scheme are publicly available information and are published on the Scheme's dedicated website. As specified in the publicly available information, if an applying professional body disagrees with the Accreditation Agent's decision regarding its application for accreditation and can demonstrate that there are grounds for appeal, it may submit an appeal to the Appeal Board of the AR Scheme. After making a determination on the appeal, the Appeal Board will provide the applying body with a response explaining the reasons for its determination.

The AR Scheme accepted applications from late December 2016 to mid-February 2017, during which applications were received from a total of 15 healthcare professions. After assessment of the applications, the Accreditation Agent determined that five healthcare professions met the eligibility criteria to undergo the accreditation process of the Pilot Scheme, namely speech therapists, clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, audiologists, and dietitians. Since 2018, one professional body from each of the five healthcare professions has passed the accreditation assessment and was granted full accreditation status. The five accredited professional bodies have already passed the accreditation assessment in two accreditation cycles. The Accreditation Agent has commenced a review on the effectiveness of the first accreditation cycle and will make recommendations on how to enhance the AR Scheme and the way forward. It will soon finalise the final report for submission to the Government. Preliminarily, the Accreditation Agent affirms that the AR Scheme has been

operating smoothly in general and has achieved the objective of ensuring professional standards of healthcare professionals, while enabling members of the public to make decisions in choosing healthcare services by providing them with more information.

Considering the development of the other healthcare professions, the Government will continue to make reference to the review and recommendations of the Accreditation Agent in driving forward the AR Scheme. The Government has no plan at present to further expand the scope of professions covered by the Scheme.

(4) and (5) In general, modes of regulation of healthcare professionals include mandatory statutory registration regime, registration under accredited schemes and voluntary registration under a society-based arrangement. These modes of regulation have different levels of regulation on professions. A mandatory statutory registration regime is not the only effective mode of regulation, nor is it applicable to the actual situation of all healthcare professions.

The Government's policy on the regulation approach for healthcare professions is to adopt a risk-based approach in determining the most suitable mode of regulation applicable to an individual healthcare profession, based on the level of risk posed on public health, healthcare quality and public safety when providing services. In general, the Government will prioritise the implementation of mandatory statutory registration regimes for healthcare professionals involved in medical procedures which are invasive or of a higher risk. At the same time, the Government will also maintain communication with the professions and adopt appropriate modes of regulation taking into consideration the actual situation of the development of various healthcare professions.

The purpose of introducing the AR Scheme is to encourage individual healthcare professions to implement a voluntary registration arrangement under the principle of professional autonomy, so as to enhance the representativeness of healthcare professional bodies, forge consensus and promote professional development. Accredited bodies should focus on strengthening the promotion of their accreditation status and enhancing their professional representation in order to attract more healthcare professionals to apply for registration. Under the risk-based approach, the Government has no plan at present to legislate in respect of the relevant healthcare professions to set up statutory registration regimes.