

Red flags lowered at some beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (June 21) that the Environmental Protection Department has classified the water quality at Lido Beach and Casam Beach in Tsuen Wan District as Grade 2, and the water quality at Anglers' Beach in Tsuen Wan District as Grade 3, which means that the water quality has improved and the beaches are suitable for swimming. The red flags have been lowered.

The red flags were hoisted at the beaches earlier due to the water quality being classified as Grade 4 and unsuitable for swimming.

Tenders invited for licence of fee-paying public car park

The Government Property Agency is inviting tenders for a three-year licence of a fee-paying public car park on portions of the Ground Floor of West Kowloon Government Offices, 11 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

The premises should be used for the purpose of a fee-paying public car park for the parking of private cars only.

The tender notice was uploaded today (June 21) to the Agency's website: www.gpa.gov.hk. Tender documents are available for collection at the Government Property Agency, 9/F, South Tower, West Kowloon Government Offices, 11 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, during the period from 9am to 6pm from Monday to Friday, except public holidays. The documents can also be downloaded from the Agency's website.

Interested tenderers who wish to attend a site inspection should make a prior appointment with the Government Property Agency by calling 3842 6777 on or before July 3.

Tenderers must submit their tenders by placing them in the Government Logistics Department Tender Box situated on the Ground Floor, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong, before noon on July 12. Late tenders will not be accepted.

LCQ13: Public dental services

Following is a question by the Hon JoePHY Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 21):

Question:

A recent survey has revealed that 70 per cent of the respondents have suffered from various degrees of dental diseases, and that nearly 60 per cent of the respondents have not taken the initiative to seek consultation due to financial reasons. On the other hand, there are currently 39 government dental clinics in Hong Kong, but only 11 of them provide free emergency dental treatment services (commonly known as "General Public dental sessions" (GP dental sessions)). This, coupled with the limited consultation quota, has rendered public dental services generally unavailable to members of the public. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has plans to provide GP dental sessions at the remaining 28 government dental clinics with a view to achieving the goal of "making public dental services available in every district", thereby responding to the urgent call from members of the public for public dental services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has plans to introduce "dental care voucher" to divert the demand for public dental services to the private market through the public-private partnership approach; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will look into expanding the scope of use of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme to cover dental services at the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, so as to reduce the pressure of demand for public dental services in Hong Kong; and

(4) as the Government has earlier pointed out that it will look into the admission of non-locally trained dentists to alleviate the problem of manpower shortage of dentists, and plans to submit a legislative proposal into this Council within this year, of the relevant work progress?

Reply:

President,

The Government's current dental care policy aims to raise public awareness of oral hygiene and health through publicity and education, and to encourage the public to develop good oral hygiene habits. Generally speaking, the need for dental treatment or surgery due to tooth decay and gum diseases

can be greatly reduced if good oral hygiene habits are maintained.

Under the current policy, the Government mainly undertakes publicity, education and promotion of oral health, particularly with emphases on nurturing children's good oral hygiene habits from an early age and providing the comprehensive School Dental Care Service to children. Apart from the School Dental Care Service, the Government currently also provides or subsidises limited dental care services, which mainly include the implementation of measures catering for persons with special dental care needs, especially the elderly with financial difficulties or persons who have difficulties in accessing general dental services. At present, dental care (particularly curative treatment) for the general public is mainly provided by private dentists. The provision of treatment for the public for emergency cases is only of limited supplementary nature rather than comprehensive dental services.

Services provided by the Government for persons with special dental care needs cover special oral care services (including the Healthy Teeth Collaboration) for persons with an intellectual disability, as well as dental care support for the elderly under the Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly and the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme funded by the Community Care Fund. Also, elderly persons may use the Elderly Health Care Vouchers (EHCVs) to receive dental services in the private sector, and persons with financial difficulties may receive subsidy to cover dental treatment expenses under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme. These services for targeted groups are not provided by government dental clinics.

The reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Joephy Chan is as follows:

(1) Under the civil service terms of appointment, the Government is obliged to provide dental benefits for civil servants/pensioners and their eligible dependents. Dental clinics under the Department of Health (DH) are established primarily for fulfilling this obligation. That said, the Government uses a small fraction of the service capacity of the dental clinics to provide free emergency dental treatment to the general public (commonly referred to as General Public or GP sessions). The DH allocates certain sessions each week in its 11 government dental clinics to provide GP sessions for citizens in need, covering services such as treatment of acute dental diseases, prescriptions for pain relief, treatment of oral abscesses and tooth extraction. Dentists will also provide professional advice with regard to the needs of individual patients. Since the DH's dental clinics mainly provide dental benefits for eligible persons and only a small fraction of these dental clinics' service capacity is used for emergency GP sessions to provide limited supplementary support, it is not possible for the DH to increase the number of government dental clinics providing GP sessions, or allocate more slots for these sessions on top of the existing ones.

(2) Established in December 2022, the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care (the Working Group) advises the Government on the long-term strategy for oral health and dental care, as well as matters including the enhancement of

the scope and mode of public or subsidised services. It comprises non-official members and ex-officio members for a two-year tenure until the end of 2024.

The Working Group is discussing the enhancement of oral health measures and dental care services based on the following framework:

- (a) to determine the service scope of primary dental services suitable for different age groups with the premise of preventing oral diseases and enhancing the oral health of the community in line with the Primary Healthcare Blueprint;
- (b) to define various underprivileged groups, groups with special needs and groups of higher risks, and review the existing needs and service coverage in order to provide more targeted dental care services;
- (c) to review the manpower resources and related training arrangements of various dental professionals to tie in with the strategic development needs of the overall oral health and dental care; and
- (d) to review the complementary arrangements for dental services, including the models and financial arrangements under which services provided or subsidised by the public sector are delivered, as well as the use of electronic health records, with a view to ensuring service efficacy.

Issues concerning public-private partnership raised in the question will also be covered in the discussion of the Working Group.

(3) The pilot scheme for the use of EHCVs at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH) was launched on October 6, 2015, and has been regularised since June 26, 2019. Currently, eligible elderly persons can use EHCVs to pay for the fees of outpatient healthcare services provided by a total of 15 designated clinics/departments of the HKU-SZH and the Huawei Li Zhi Yuan Community Health Service Center, including the dental services provided by these service points. The Government allows the use of EHCVs at the HKU-SZH having regard to its adoption of the "Hong Kong management model" with healthcare service standards and clinical governance structures similar to those of Hong Kong. The Government will sum up the experience gained in the EHCV scheme at the HKU-SZH and consider the feasibility of further extending the application of EHCVs to cover the Mainland medical institutions in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, in particular those having adopted the "Hong Kong management model" and with healthcare service standards and clinical governance structures comparable to the HKU-SZH's. The management model and healthcare level of such medical institutions must meet the stipulated requirements and be aligned with those of Hong Kong. To this end, the Government is currently mapping out the detailed standards and prerequisites for extending the coverage.

(4) To tackle the shortage of dentists, the Government is actively exploring the amendment of the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156) to create new pathways for the admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists to

practice in specified institutions, and to reform the regulatory framework for dentists and ancillary dental workers, so as to ensure adequate manpower support for the local public or subsidised dental care services in the long run.

The Government has been progressively seeking views from relevant stakeholders on the matters of legislative amendments, and will consult the Legislative Council Panel of Health Services in July this year. The Government's target is to introduce the amendment bill into the Legislative Council by the end of 2023.

LCQ16: Supporting persons with hearing impairment

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 21):

Question:

According to the figures of the Census and Statistics Department, there were 246 200 persons with hearing difficulty across the territory in 2020. Regarding the support for persons with hearing impairment, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of (i) the number of deaf/hard-of-hearing persons in Hong Kong, (ii) the respective numbers of them using the services of various government departments, (iii) the number of times they required the service of sign language interpreters (SLIs) when using the services of various government departments and (iv) the average time of each use of SLI service, in each of the past five years;
- (2) of the number of deaf persons using the 992 Emergency SMS service of the Hong Kong Police Force, the average time taken from case-reporting to police arrival at the scene, as well as the average waiting time for SLI service by such persons when reporting cases at police stations respectively in each of the past five years;
- (3) given that the Police indicated in a media interview in 2017 that it would study the feasibility of processing photos and videos by the 992 Emergency SMS service, of the current progress of the relevant work;
- (4) whether it knows the number of persons on the list of SLIs maintained by the Judiciary and the number of court proceedings in which sign language interpretation service was required by deaf/hard-of-hearing persons, in each

of the past five years; whether such information will be made open for public access; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) as there are views that the integrated education currently implemented by the Education Bureau lacks support for deaf/hard-of-hearing persons in the learning of sign language, whether the Government will enhance sign language education for deaf/hard-of-hearing persons and others; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) as it is learnt that currently, there is no official standard sign language system in Hong Kong, whether the Government will implement an official sign language system; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(7) of the details of the Government's latest and future policies implemented in respect of supporting deaf/hard-of-hearing persons?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Judiciary and government bureaux, I set out below a consolidated reply to the Member's question:

(1) (i) According to "Special Topics Report No. 63 – Persons with disabilities and chronic diseases" published by the Census and Statistics Department in December 2021, there were 47 900 persons with hearing difficulty in 2020, i.e. those who perceived themselves as having "a lot of long-term difficulty" in hearing or "cannot hear at all" with one ear or both ears even when using a hearing aid if necessary at the time of enumeration. In the same year, there were 246 200 persons who perceived themselves as having long-term difficulty in hearing in quiet environment or using specialised hearing aids/tools at the time of enumeration. The Government does not maintain relevant figures for the year 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022.

(ii) Number of persons with hearing impairment using the services of various government departments in the past five years is as follows:

ã€€	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Development Bureau	0	0	2	0	0
Education Bureau	770	730	850	1 040	900
Home Affairs Bureau / Home and Youth Affairs Bureau	0	0	0	2	0

Labour and Welfare Bureau	740	670	540	590	590
Buildings Department	7	14	6	10	3
Companies Registry	1	1	1	1	1
Customs and Excise Department	0	1	0	1	0
Home Affairs Department (Home Affairs Enquiry Centres)	8	15	25	57	27
Labour Department	516	443	433	477	421
Official Receiver's Office	0	0	1	0	0
Planning Department	1	2	21	1	0
Post Office	18	19	20	24	24
Rating and Valuation Department	0	0	2	2	3
Water Supplies Department	77	69	56	74	89

Other government departments do not maintain relevant statistics.

(iii) and (iv) In the past five years, the number of times persons with hearing impairment required the service of sign language interpreters when using the services of various government departments and the average time of each use of the service of sign language interpreters are as follows:

ã€€	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Number of times (average time (around))				
Department of Health	24 (2 hours 23 mins)	59 (1 hour 54 mins)	34 (1 hour 23 mins)	35 (2 hours 2 mins)	42 (2 hours 8 mins)
Customs and Excise Department	0	1 (10 hours)	0	1 (2 hours)	0

Immigration Department	2 (5 hours)	1 (3 hours)	3 (7 hours)	3 (2 hours)	0
Labour Department	15 (3 hours 30 mins)	15 (3 hours 15 mins)	3 (4 hours 40 mins)	9 (4 hours 23 mins)	6 (3 hours 30 mins)
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	6 (1 hour 20 mins)	11 (1 hour 21 mins)	4 (1 hour 8 mins)	5 (1 hour 21 mins)	5 (1 hour 42 mins)

Other government departments do not maintain relevant statistics.

(2) Since October 2004, the Police have launched the 992 SMS emergency hotline for persons with hearing or speech impairments. The number of registered users with hearing or speech impairments and usage of the Police's 992 reporting system in the past five years are as follows:

ã€€	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of registered users	1 772	1 860	1 884	1 914	1 937
Number of emergency text messages	34	18	37	17	16

Regardless of the form of reporting for assistance, the Police will follow established procedures and rules, to immediately classify the case and dispatch appropriate Police officers to handle the request having regard to the seriousness of the case. The Police do not maintain statistics on the actual average time required between receiving a request and arrival of Police officers.

According to the priority of each case, the Police will arrange sign language interpreters for those who made a report at Police station with genuine needs as soon as possible. The Police do not maintain information on the average waiting time for sign language interpreters.

(3) At present, the public can report crimes through different means, such as uploading images and videos to the e-Report Room. As for processing photos and videos through the 992 emergency SMS service, the Police are going to launch the new generation Emergency Telephone System by updating the Fourth Generation of Command and Control Communications System, which includes a text, photo and video processing platform. This platform allows the public to send text, photo and video messages related to the reported crimes to the Police. This will also be applicable to the 992 reporting system to assist

deaf or persons with hearing impairment to report crimes. The Police target to roll out the service within one to two years.

(4) To facilitate the administration of justice, sign language interpretation service is provided, as directed by the Court, to a witness or a party who has such a need in any court proceedings or part of any legal proceedings. To this end, the Judiciary Administration maintains a pool of experienced sign language freelance interpreters (FITs) who are engaged as and when necessary.

In the past five years, the number of sign language FITs in the pool and the number of bookings requesting sign language interpretation service are as follows:

ã€€	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of sign language FITs	10	12	17	15	15
Number of bookings requesting sign language interpretation service (Note)	119	118	141	79	100

Note: The majority are short hearings such as call-over, mention, pre-trial review, sentencing, plea, etc.

General information on sign language interpretation service, including the request form for the relevant service, are made public through the Judiciary's website, which will be updated as and when necessary.

(5) The Government adopts a dual-track mode in the implementation of special education. The Education Bureau will, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and with parents' consent, refer students with more severe or multiple disabilities to aided special schools for intensive support services. Other students with special educational needs will attend ordinary schools for integrated education.

For students with hearing impairment, the Education Bureau has all along been encouraging schools to adopt appropriate modes to teach and to communicate with students having regard to their abilities and needs. Generally speaking, the speech reception and oral language-learning abilities of students with hearing impairment studying in ordinary schools are comparatively better. With the aid of hearing devices, they can acquire knowledge through the use of oral language, communicate with their teachers and schoolmates, and develop social skills and interpersonal relationship. Teachers will use oral language with the support of visual strategies, contextual cues, body language, written text, gestures, etc, in communicating with the students and in teaching.

The Education Bureau has been providing ordinary primary and secondary schools with additional resources (such as Learning Support Grant) to support students with hearing impairment. If schools consider it more appropriate to

adopt sign language or combine the use of sign language to assist students in learning, they may deploy the additional resources holistically and flexibly for employing teachers or teaching assistants who know sign language, or hiring professional services including sign interpretation service to cater for the needs of students with hearing impairment.

Regarding education on sign language, the Education Bureau has all along been supporting the School for Children with Hearing Impairment to implement various projects of "Sign-assisted Instruction", including the "Development of New Vocabulary of Sign Language for New Senior Secondary Curriculum" programme and the "Removing Communication Barriers in Sign Language and Oral Language Holistic Support for Students with Hearing Impairment" programme, to continuously integrate and develop new sign vocabularies needed in teaching for teachers. The School has also developed the Visual Sign Language Dictionary website compiling daily and subject-based sign vocabularies for public use. In addition, the School has set up a sign language teaching resources centre to provide consultation services for students, parents and teachers in need. The Education Bureau also encourages the School to strengthen the understanding of sign language among ordinary schools and the general public through various activities, such as "The Inter-school Sign-a-Song Contest", "Deaf Awareness Week", "Deaf Culture Day", sign language workshops and talks. The Education Bureau will continue to encourage the School to enhance the understanding of persons with hearing impairment and sign language among students, parents and teachers.

(6) and (7) The Government's policy objective is to create a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities so that they can fully integrate into society. The Government has implemented the following measures in promoting sign language and supporting the persons with hearing impairment:

(i) in September 2015, the Labour and Welfare Bureau included sign language in the domain of language courses under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) and accepted applications from course providers for registration of their sign language courses as CEF courses. At present, five relevant courses have been included in the Reimbursable Course List of the CEF. Moreover, in collaboration with the media, commercial, social welfare, public and education organisations, the Labour and Welfare Bureau implements diversified public education programmes, with a view to promoting the use of sign language and disability inclusive culture. These programmes include Sign Language Day, workshops, exhibitions, carnivals, video production, the set-up of a database on sign language, online tools/mobile app and other kits for learning sign language etc;

(ii) the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee and the Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities/Hong Kong Council of Social Service published the "List of Sign Language Interpreters in Hong Kong" (the List) in June 2016, which sets out the information of sign language interpreters (including professional qualifications, work experience and contact means) to facilitate organisations and the public to choose sign language interpretation services. The Labour and Welfare Bureau has informed all bureaux and departments to refer to the sign language interpreters on the List when engaging sign

language interpretation services. Besides, the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee has also set up the Task Force on Promotion of Sign Language to advise the Government on the related work;

(iii) for school education, the Education Bureau will continue to adopt the dual-track mode in supporting students with hearing impairment and be committed to providing them with diverse and comprehensive support services. The Education Bureau will keep encouraging schools (including ordinary schools and the School for Children with Hearing Impairment) to adopt appropriate modes (including oral, sign and total communication) in teaching and communicating with students with hearing impairment having regard to their abilities and needs, so as to help them overcome their personal limitations, and enable them to grow up healthily and unleash their potential at different developmental stages;

(iv) on social services, the Social Welfare Department allocates subventions to non-governmental organisations in operating two Multi-service Centres for Hearing Impaired Persons and four Social and Recreational Centres for the Disabled, which provide support services for persons with hearing impairment, including sign language interpretation to facilitate their communication with others and independent living in the community; and

(v) for dissemination of public information, the Information Services Department has been providing simultaneous sign language interpretation for the important press conferences, and all Government TV Announcements in the Public Interest have Chinese and English subtitles. Radio Television Hong Kong has been actively producing TV programmes which provide sign language interpretation, including broadcasting programmes with sign language interpretation for about four hours a week, introducing sign language and deaf culture, and adding sign language interpretation during live broadcasts of major events and sports events. Moreover, according to the directions issued by the Office of the Communications Authority, the three domestic free television programme service licensees are required to provide sign language interpretation and subtitles (news report with sign language) in the news report in the designated free television channel every day. While two licensees have been providing news report with sign language, the remaining licensee will provide such service by mid-August this year.

LD reminds employers and employees to take heat stroke preventive measures in times of Heat Stress at Work

Warning

As the Heat Stress at Work Warning is now in effect, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and employees to take appropriate measures during the effective period of the warning to prevent heat stroke when working in hot weather or hot environments.

Employees who work outdoors or in non-air-conditioned indoor environments face high levels of heat stress and are at a relatively higher risk of heat stroke. Employers should assess the risk factors of heat stress for employees at work and, based on the identified risk factors, take necessary preventive and control measures, including rescheduling work periods, setting up shading covers, providing ventilation and heat dissipation equipment, and reminding employees to replenish water and rest in a timely manner.

The Heat Stress at Work Warning is formulated by the LD based on the Hong Kong Heat Index. There are three levels of the warning: Amber, Red and Black, which help employers and employees better understand the level of heat stress while working outdoors or indoors without air-conditioning systems.

A spokesman for the LD said that when the department issues the Heat Stress at Work Warning, employers must refer to the criteria and recommendations provided in the "[Guidance Notes on Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work](#)" to conduct risk assessments, according to the workloads and other relevant heat stress risk factors, for employees who work outdoors or in non-air-conditioned indoor workplaces. Appropriate rest breaks should be arranged every hour, as far as reasonably practicable, based on various levels of the Heat Stress at Work Warning, to reduce employees' risk of heat stroke.

Employees must also follow instructions to rest on time. Whenever there are any symptoms of heat-related illnesses, such as headache, dizziness, thirst, and nausea, they should rest in a cool and shady place, drink water, and inform employers/supervisors to take appropriate action immediately.

The LD issued the "Guidance Notes on Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work", detailing the various risk factors that should be considered when conducting heat stress risk assessments and recommending corresponding control measures for identified risk factors for employers' and employees' reference. For the Heat Stress at Work Warning and related guidelines, please refer to the department's thematic webpage:

www.labour.gov.hk/eng/news/prevention_of_heat_stroke_at_work.htm.