

Health risk category for Air Quality Health Index may reach "Serious" level

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has recorded higher than normal air pollution levels since yesterday (July 23). According to the EPD's forecast, it is expected that the AQHI at some general and roadside air quality monitoring stations may reach the "Serious" level later today (July 24), and the air pollution levels are expected to remain higher in the next two days.

Under the continuing influence of the outer subsiding air of Tropical Cyclone In-fa, the weather in Hong Kong is very hot with light winds today, which is unfavourable for pollutant dispersion. The intense sunshine enhances photochemical smog activity and the rapid formation of ozone and fine particulates in the Pearl River Delta region. The airstream with high regional background pollutant concentrations is affecting Hong Kong. The high level of ozone has promoted the formation of nitrogen dioxide.

According to the Hong Kong Observatory, a southwesterly airstream is expected to bring showers to the coast of southern China next week. It is expected that pollution levels will remain higher until then.

With a health risk category in the "Very High" or "Serious" levels, children, the elderly and persons with existing heart or respiratory illnesses are advised to reduce physical exertion and outdoor activities to a minimum or avoid such activities. The general public are advised to reduce, or reduce to a minimum, outdoor physical exertion, and to reduce time staying outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. As health effects of air pollutants may vary for individuals, persons who are in doubt or experience discomfort should seek advice from health-care professionals. The public may visit the Centre for Health Protection's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/content/9/460/3557.html) for more information on health effects of air pollution and relevant health advice.

The Education Bureau (EDB) urges all schools to visit the EDB's website for appropriate measures to safeguard students' health and take note of changes in the index. The relevant hyperlink is as follows:
www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/about-activities/sch-activities-guidelines/index.html.

When the AQHI is at the "Very High" level, employers of outdoor workers performing heavy manual work are advised to assess the risk of outdoor work and take appropriate preventive measures to protect the health of their employees, such as reducing outdoor physical exertion and the time of their stay outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. At the "Serious" level, employers of all outdoor workers are advised to assess the risk of outdoor work and take appropriate preventive measures to protect the health of their employees.

Members of the public can check the current AQHI readings at the EPD's website (www.aqhi.gov.hk/en.html) or by calling the hotline 2827 8541.

CHP investigates two additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, July 24, the CHP was investigating two additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 11 976 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 11 975 confirmed cases and one probable case).

All of the newly reported cases are imported cases.

A total of 24 cases have been reported in the past 14 days (July 10 to 23), including 23 imported cases and one import-related case.

Separately, according to the testing and quarantine arrangements for local COVID-19 cases with mutant strains, the CHP reminded that persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on days 3, 7, 12 and 19 following the announcement of the relevant confirmed cases by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day. Relevant deadlines of compulsory testing for respective specified premises are listed on the Government's website at

www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf.

Specified persons in relation to the following specified premises are also reminded to undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the Compulsory Testing Notice (CTN) tomorrow (July 25):

- Chung Mei Building, 149-157 Tai Kok Tsui Road, Tai Kok Tsui
- Block 6, Handsome Court, 388 Castle Peak Road, Tuen Mun

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited specified venues under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid testing according to compulsory testing notices (CTNs). The Regulation also requires

all household members of close contacts of confirmed cases to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test within a specified period according to CTNs published in the Gazette. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop, and undergo testing as soon as possible.

The CHP strongly urged members of the public to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong, in particular to specified places with extremely high risk and very high risk under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H). If travel is unavoidable, the CHP highly recommended the public to be fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines before their departure with a view to lowering their chances of being infected with COVID-19 overseas. They should continue to wear a surgical mask and maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene at all times. Parents are also urged to avoid taking unvaccinated children to travel. The spokesman stressed, "The global situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility, and there are also reports of breakthrough infections in some vaccinated individuals. Members of the public must seriously evaluate the risk of non-essential travel."

The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

The CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes. Moreover, vaccination may help keep people from getting seriously ill even if they do get COVID-19, and, generally speaking, vaccines can also reduce the chance of transmission by those who have been vaccinated. People vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine can also generate herd immunity. Members of the public are urged to get vaccinated as soon as possible and book their vaccination appointments at the website (booking.covidvaccine.gov.hk/forms/index.jsp).

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps). After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs," the spokesman said.

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic

Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

Transcript of remarks by SLW on unemployment rate and vaccination for elderly

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on unemployment rate and vaccination for the elderly people after attending a radio programme this morning (July 24):

Reporter: You said during the radio programme that you are optimistic in the unemployment rate to go further down next month. Can you tell us why you are so optimistic? Secondly, about the vaccination rate for elderly people living in care homes, does the Government have any plans to send out more outreach teams to get them vaccinated, since the rate is so low right now?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: Looking at all the indicators, including economic indicators and our labour market situation, such as jobs available, people looking for jobs, etc, the trend is definitely telling us that it's going down, in terms of the unemployment rate. But how fast it will go down is something that we can't really predict, but the trend is going down.

As to the question related to vaccination in our residential care homes (RCHs), particularly for those in residential care homes for the elderly, we have started the first round (of Outreach Vaccination Arrangement for RCHs under COVID-19 Vaccination Programme) a couple of months ago, but at that time because of the lack of information and difficulty in making decisions, the vaccination rate is a bit too low we must say. We have just started another round, providing more information, simpler information, telling people that if they have been receiving seasonal influenza vaccination all the time, now they can use this COVID-19 vaccine. So, we hope that the simplified message would help people to make up their mind for vaccination. In terms of the outreach work, primarily because in the past when we were doing the seasonal influenza vaccination, we had a vaccination rate between 70 to 80 per cent and they were primarily conducted by doctors in private practice. We have secured sufficient support from them and we hope that in the coming round of vaccination, there will be more people willing to participate and they can get a jab.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

[CHP reminds public on precautions against heat stroke during very hot weather](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (July 24) reminded members of the public, particularly those undertaking outdoor activities, to take heed of necessary measures against heat stroke and sunburn in very hot weather.

"The public should carry and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration while engaging in outdoor activities," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"Those engaged in strenuous outdoor activities should avoid beverages

containing caffeine, such as coffee and tea, as well as alcohol, as they speed up water loss through the urinary system," the spokesman explained.

"The obese, the sick, including those with heart disease or high blood pressure, the old and the young are more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses. They should pay special attention," the spokesman added.

The public should adopt the following precautions:

- Wear loose and light-coloured clothing to reduce heat absorption and facilitate sweat evaporation and heat dissipation;
- Avoid vigorous exercise and prolonged activities like hiking or trekking as heat, sweating and exhaustion can place additional demands on the physique;
- Perform outdoor activities in the morning or late afternoon;
- For indoor activities, open all windows, use a fan or use air-conditioning to maintain good ventilation; and
- Reschedule work to cooler times of the day.

If working in a hot environment is inevitable, introduce shade in the workplace where practicable. Start work slowly and pick up the pace gradually. Move to a cool area for rest at regular intervals to allow the body to recuperate.

The public should also note the latest and the forecast Ultraviolet (UV) Index released by the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO). When the UV Index is high (6 or above):

- Minimise direct exposure of the skin and the eyes to sunlight;
- Wear long-sleeved and loose-fitting clothes;
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat or use an umbrella;
- Seek a shaded area or put on UV-blocking sunglasses;
- Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen lotion with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or above. Apply liberally and reapply after swimming, sweating or toweling off; and
- While using DEET-containing insect repellents for personal protection against mosquito-borne diseases, apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent.

If symptoms develop, such as dizziness, headache, nausea, shortness of breath or confusion, rest and seek help immediately, and seek medical advice as soon as possible.

The public may obtain more information from the DH's Health Education Infoline (2833 0111), [heat stroke](#) page and [UV radiation](#) page; the HKO's Dial-a-Weather (1878 200), latest [weather and forecast](#), [UV Index](#) and weather information for [hiking and mountaineering](#); and [press releases](#) of the Labour Department on precautions against heat stroke for outdoor workers and their employers when the Very Hot Weather Warning is in force.

Assess the risk of heat stroke to employees

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following special announcement immediately, and repeat it at frequent intervals when the Very Hot Weather Warning is in force:

The Labour Department reminds employers that as the Very Hot Weather Warning is in force, they should assess the risk of heat stroke to their employees and adopt effective preventive measures such as providing cool drinking water, setting up temporary sunshade, providing mechanical aids to reduce physical exertion of employees and providing for employees as far as practicable covered space with good ventilation for rest and meals. Employees should drink water regularly and be mindful of their physical condition. If early heat stroke symptoms such as headache and thirst appear, they should rest in a cool or shady place and drink water immediately. They should also inform their supervisors to take appropriate action.