

Update on cluster of Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci cases in Hong Kong East Cluster

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

Regarding an earlier announcement on a cluster of patients confirmed to be carriers of Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) in a medical ward of Ruttonjee Hospital (RH), the spokesman for Hong Kong East Cluster made the following update today (June 9):

In accordance with the prevailing infection control guidelines, RH has conducted contact tracing. Two more male patients (aged 29 and 79) were found to be VRE carriers without any symptoms of infection. Both of them had been discharged.

The following infection control measures have already been implemented according to established guidelines:

1. Enhanced hand hygiene and stringent contact precautions;
2. Enhanced attention to contamination-prone procedures; and
3. Enhanced disinfection and cleansing of the ward concerned.

The hospital will continue the enhanced infection control measures and closely monitor the situation of the ward. The cases have been reported to the Hospital Authority Head Office and the Centre for Health Protection for necessary follow-up.

CHP investigates suspected case of food poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (June 9) investigating a suspected food poisoning case involving consumption of mushrooms.

The case involves two females and one male aged 73 to 75 who developed gastrointestinal symptoms, numbness and palpitation about one and a half to three and a half hours after consuming self-made tea with mushrooms, purchased from a store in Ap Lei Chau, at a restaurant on the morning of June 3. The patients sought medical advice at the Accident and Emergency Department of Queen Mary Hospital on the same day and were admitted for

treatment. They have been in stable condition all along and were discharged upon management.

The CHP's investigations are ongoing and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department was also alerted to the case.

"Mushroom poisoning is generally acute. Common presentations include gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain appearing shortly after ingestion. Depending on the mushroom species, patients may also have other symptoms like profuse sweating, hallucination, coma or other neurological symptoms as well as liver failure. Death may result in severe cases," a CHP spokesman said.

"We advise the public to buy mushrooms from reputable and reliable suppliers and not to buy mushroom products which may be mixed with unknown species. Members of the public should not pick wild mushrooms for consumption as it is difficult to distinguish edible mushroom species from inedible ones. Mixing of edible species with inedible or poisonous species of mushroom will not dilute toxicity. Cooking in most cases does not destroy toxicity," the spokesman added.

"If mushroom poisoning is suspected, the patient should seek immediate medical attention and bring along any available remnant for identification," the spokesman said.

[Update on monitoring COVID-19 vaccination](#)

In the preceding week till 11.59pm on June 6, the Department of Health (DH) received 166 reports (Note 1) of adverse events following COVID-19 immunisation. No death case was reported by the Hospital Authority (HA) involving individuals who had received vaccines within 14 days before they passed away and had potential association with vaccination.

As at 8pm on June 6, over 2.63 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered for members of the public. Around 1.53 million people had received at least one dose of vaccine, accounting for 23.3 per cent of the population aged 16 or above. The DH received 3 456 reports (Note 1) of adverse events (0.13 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered). Among the death cases concerning persons who had been vaccinated, including 21 death cases with vaccination within 14 days before they passed away (0.0008 per cent of total vaccine doses administered), none of the death cases were associated with vaccination.

As at June 6, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation (Note 2) had concluded that six death cases

had no causal relationship with vaccination, and preliminarily considered that 15 cases were not associated with vaccination. The Expert Committee considered that there is no unusual pattern identified so far, and will continue to closely monitor the relevant situation and collect data for assessment.

According to information from the HA, during the period from May 10 to June 6, the ratio of death cases out of those without a vaccination record was 55.6 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases for those with a vaccination record was 2.9 cases for every 100 000 people. The overall death rate is similar to that recorded in the past three years. Out of those without a vaccination record, the ratio of death cases with acute stroke or acute myocardial infarction was 2.6 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases under the same category for those with a vaccination record was 0.2 cases for every 100 000 people. Furthermore, the ratio of miscarriage cases out of those without a vaccination record was 23.8 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of miscarriage cases for those who had a vaccination record was 4.7 cases for every 100 000 people. Based on the statistical analysis of the above figures, there is no evidence that vaccination increases the risk of death or miscarriage for recipients. The relevant reference statistics will be uploaded to the thematic website for the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

The majority of non-death cases of adverse events received so far are relatively minor cases. The relevant details can be found in the "Report on the Safety Monitoring of COVID-19 Vaccines in Hong Kong" (www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/do/en/doc/Safety_Monitoring_of_COVID-19_Vaccines_in_Hong_Kong.pdf).

Note 1: Provisional figures

Note 2: The Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation performs continuous monitoring of the possible adverse events following administration of COVID-19 vaccines, and provides professional views and suggestions on safety monitoring of the authorised COVID-19 vaccines. The membership list and the key functions of the Expert Committee can be found at the following website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en/expert).

LCQ19: Applications to Hong Kong Arts Development Council for grants

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

It has been reported that an arts group received in the past three years grants from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) totalling \$2.78 million, some of which was used in the production of a film "Inside the Red Brick Wall". There are comments querying that as the said film advocates hatred, violence and anti-government sentiments, HKADC should not have sponsored the film's production with public money. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the number of films sponsored by HKADC in each of the past five years, and set out in a table the amount of grant received by each film;

(2) whether it knows the criteria adopted by HKADC for vetting and approving grant applications and deciding the amount of the grant; and

(3) of the new measures in place to spur HKADC to vet and approve grant applications more stringently, so as to prevent the situation of public money being used to sponsor arts groups in producing artistic work that advocates hatred and violence, or violates the National Security Law for Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), my reply to the various parts of the Member's question is set out as follows.

The HKADC operates funding schemes of different nature to support local arts groups and arts practitioners to pursue and implement creative endeavours to nurture artistic excellence.

There are two main types of grants, i.e. Year Grant and Project Grant. The former is provided on organisation basis and provides greater room for creativity (including project format, content, etc.) during the grant period. The latter is provided on project basis which requires the submission of project details at the time of application. In 2020-21, the HKADC funded 60 arts groups (including five film and media arts groups) under Year Grant (including the Literary Arts Platform Scheme) and 267 projects (including nine film projects) under Project Grant, involving a funding allocation totalling \$102,666,400.

(1) Details of arts groups and artists who received grants from the HKADC under the Project Grant to implement film projects, and details of film and media arts groups who received Year Grant from the HKADC in the past five years are set out in Annexes 1 and 2 respectively. The HKADC has not kept information on the breakdown of expenditure on individual film projects by Year Grant recipients.

(2) Since 1999, the HKADC has put in place an approval mechanism to process

grant applications by "peer assessment". Through open recruitment and selection, it has appointed arts professionals and veterans as examiners to assist in assessing applications for various grants and effectiveness of funded programmes and make funding recommendations for endorsement of the HKADC. The "peer assessment" mechanism and the funding mechanism aim to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) minimising the chance of conflict of interests;
- (b) enhancing professionalism of "peer assessment"; and
- (c) by having the examiners' funding recommendations endorsed by the committee/council, ensuring that HKADC members exercise their monitoring power and shoulder the final gate-keeping responsibility.

According to its established procedures, the HKADC regularly recruits and selects, through voluntary nominations and open invitations in newspapers, arts practitioners and professionals from various arts sectors to serve as examiners for various assessment exercises. Currently, the HKADC has 103 arts consultants and 602 examiners. The HKADC reviews the implementation of the examiners' system from time to time to ensure the quality of examiners and to refine the mechanism. The HKADC will review the performance of examiners on a regular basis, for example, by taking into account their past attendance records and records of assessments as one of the references in considering service extension.

The HKADC has set up approval mechanisms to process applications of Year Grant and Project Grant respectively to ensure that assessments are conducted professionally and impartially and that the approvals are given stringently. The assessment panels are composed of examiners and HKADC members of the relevant art form groups with a system of declaration of interests put in place. The HKADC will also invite external experts to assist in the adjudication if necessary. In order to ensure professionalism and credibility of assessment, examiners are selected for appointment to assessment panels based on their professional backgrounds and qualifications and are decided by drawing lots.

(3) Ying E Chi Limited (Ying E Chi) was one of the arts groups receiving Year Grant in 2020-21. The grant amount was \$892,400, which was about 0.9 per cent of the total grants approved under HKADC's Year Grant and Project Grant during the year. The HKADC did not fund the production of "Inside the Red Brick Wall" by Ying E Chi. It was one of the films arranged for screening in the Hong Kong Independent Film Festival organised by Ying E Chi. The HKADC has required all arts groups receiving grants, including Year Grant and Project Grant, to undertake that they will fulfil the terms of the contract entered into with the HKADC, including compliance with the laws of Hong Kong during the grant period. The HKADC also issues letters from time to time to remind all arts groups receiving Year Grant to comply with the laws of Hong Kong and other contract terms. The last occasion when the HKADC issued such a letter was in January 2021. If arts groups receiving grants breach contract terms in any respect as confirmed by law, including advocating the independence of Hong Kong and overthrowing the Government under the current laws of Hong Kong, the HKADC may exercise its rights to postpone, adjust or

suspend grant disbursement for the funded arts groups for the grant year.

In addition, the HKADC will examine the funding contracts to be entered into with grantees to ensure that their content complies with the requirements of the latest legislations. The HKADC will also organise talks to provide grantees with information relating to the requirements of the National Security Law and other new legislations so as to enhance their understanding of the relevant laws.

[Record of Discussion of the Meeting of the Exchange Fund Advisory Committee Currency Board Sub-Committee held on April 27](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

(Approved for Issue by the Exchange Fund Advisory Committee by Circulation)

Report on Currency Board Operations (January 1 – April 15, 2021)

The Sub-Committee noted that the Hong Kong dollar (HKD) traded within a range of 7.7512 – 7.7848 against the US dollar during the review period. The HKD stayed firm and traded close to the strong-side Convertibility Undertaking in January and February, mainly driven by equity-related demand arising from fund-raising activities and the southbound Stock Connect. Since March, the HKD softened slightly along with the stock market correction, and as a result of the lower southbound buying flows and the repatriation of initial public offering proceeds by some newly-listed companies. With the sizeable Aggregate Balance, HKD interbank interest rates (i.e. HIBORs) stayed at a low level throughout the review period. Overall, the HKD exchange and interbank markets continued to trade in a smooth and orderly manner.

The Sub-Committee noted that the Monetary Base increased to HK\$2,107.09 billion at the end of the review period. In accordance with the Currency Board principles, all changes in the Monetary Base had been fully matched by corresponding changes in foreign reserves.

The Report on Currency Board Operations for the review period is at Annex.

Monitoring of Risks and Vulnerabilities

The Sub-Committee noted that longer-term US Treasury yields had picked up notably since late January along with the vaccine rollout and the additional fiscal stimulus, triggering global yield rises, market sell-offs, and reduced fund inflows into emerging markets Asia. Nevertheless, asset valuations remained stretched, and were susceptible to any adverse pandemic development, premature tightening of global financial conditions amid continued concerns over US inflation, as well as renewed increase in China-US tensions.

The Sub-Committee further noted that with the global economy gradually returning to normalcy, policymakers continued to face the difficult policy questions of phasing their exits from supportive measures and addressing long-term scarring effects of the pandemic. In the Mainland China, the policy focus had shifted to containing systemic risks, and there were more defaults of weak corporates in recent quarters.

The Sub-Committee noted that the Hong Kong economy saw some improvement in the fourth quarter of 2020 and early 2021. For 2021 as a whole, real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was expected to resume positive growth. However, as widespread vaccination took time, the economy still faced considerable challenges in the early part of 2021. The labour market would remain under pressure in the near term, while inflationary pressures were expected to stay muted. Meanwhile, housing prices and transactions picked up in March and early April.

Implications of the US Dollar Depreciation on Hong Kong

The Sub-Committee noted a paper which examined the implications of USD depreciation on the Hong Kong economy through scenario analysis. The paper found that USD depreciation could affect Hong Kong's real GDP and inflation through trade, financial and risk channels. The overall impact would depend on the extent and nature of the USD depreciation.