

[Hong Kong Customs seizes largest batch of suspected scheduled wood logs in past five years \(with photo\)](#)

â€‹Hong Kong Customs seized about 211 tonnes of suspected scheduled wood logs of an endangered species with an estimated market value of about \$1.1 million from seven containers at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound and the Tsing Yi Customs Cargo Examination Compound between April 29 and today (May 5). This is the largest seizure of suspected scheduled wood logs made by Customs over the past five years.

Through risk assessment, Customs officers selected seven containers that arrived in Hong Kong from Cambodia for inspection during the above-mentioned period. Upon inspection, the batch of suspected scheduled wood logs was found inside the containers.

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.

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



LCQ18: Handling defective drainage systems in buildings

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

The Government plans to launch in May this year a \$1 billion Building Drainage System Repair Subsidy Scheme (the Subsidy Scheme) to subsidise owners of buildings aged 40 or above (quite a number of which being "three-nil" buildings) to repair the defective drainage systems in such buildings. The owners of such buildings may take the initiative to submit applications under the Subsidy Scheme. The Buildings Department will also select buildings with outstanding statutory orders relating to common drains and employ contractors to carry out the required works on behalf of the owners concerned. Regarding the handling of defective drainage systems in buildings, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Government expects that investigation or repair works for the common drainage systems of 300 eligible buildings will commence within this year, how many of those buildings are located in Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin districts respectively;

(2) in respect of those applications submitted under the Subsidy Scheme by owners on their own initiative, of the channels through which the public can learn about the progress and results of the various applications; the time normally taken to complete the vetting and approval of the applications as estimated by the Government; whether it has established a mechanism for owners whose applications have been rejected to lodge appeals;

(3) given that the common drains of quite a number of buildings in old districts such as Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin had been improperly altered when the units in the buildings were converted into sub-divided units (SDUs), thereby increasing the risk of epidemic spreading, whether the Government will exercise discretion to accept applications submitted by owners of buildings aged under 40 but with a lot of SDUs;

(4) whether the SDU households in "three-nil" buildings, upon discovery of seepage in the drainage systems of the buildings in which they reside, may take the initiative to request the Government to arrange, under the Subsidy Scheme, repair works for the drainage systems concerned;

(5) in respect of those cases in which the relevant owners of building units have failed to restore, in accordance with statutory orders, their units which had been converted into SDUs in breach of regulations and the common drains which had been haphazardly connected, what policies the Government has put in place to eradicate the drain seepage problem concerned; and

(6) how the Government will promote the Subsidy Scheme to the community at this stage and after the commencement of the Subsidy Scheme?

Reply:

President,

To assist the public in dealing with defective drains amid the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government has recently obtained from the Legislative Council a funding of \$1 billion to launch the Building Drainage System Repair Subsidy Scheme (DRS) to subsidise the investigation, repair, rectification and/or upgrading works of the drainage systems of old residential or composite buildings. The scheme has been implemented since May 1, 2021.

In consultation with the Buildings Department (BD) and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), the Development Bureau provides a consolidated reply as follows:

(1) Our aim is to commence investigation or repair works under the DRS for the common drains of 300 old buildings within this year. Applications for the DRS will be accepted on a "per-building" basis. The DRS covers two categories of buildings, including eligible buildings of which owners wish to organise the works by themselves (viz. Category 1 buildings) and eligible buildings with outstanding statutory orders issued by the BD in relation to defective common drains yet the relevant owners are unable to organise the required works by themselves (viz. Category 2 buildings). The BD will actively select Category 2 buildings and exercise its statutory power to arrange default works consultants and government contractors to carry out the requisite works in default of the owners concerned. The BD will seek to recover the remaining balance of the cost involved from the owners after deducting the subsidy under the DRS.

At the initial stage of the scheme, on the risk-based principle, regardless of Category 1 or Category 2 buildings mentioned above, we will focus on handling buildings with outstanding statutory orders relating to the common drains. According to records, there are in total around 20 such buildings that are eligible in Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin districts (viz. buildings aged 40 or above within the rateable value limit). As the DRS just started accepting initial stage applications for Category 1 buildings across the territory, and the BD is also selecting initial stage cases among Category 2 buildings across the territory, the number of buildings in Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin districts that may commence investigation or repair works in this year could not be ascertained now. At the later stage, we will allow other eligible buildings without outstanding statutory orders related to common drains to participate in the DRS.

(2) Eligible building owners may make enquiries on the DRS with the URA, including the progress and results of their applications.

In the initial stage of the DRS, the URA estimates that an approval-in-principle could be granted in around two weeks after receiving the applications (including all necessary information). Upon completion of works,

applicants may submit an application for the disbursement of subsidy to the URA. The subsidy could be disbursed in a month's time upon receipt of all the necessary documents. Owners may lodge an appeal with the URA if their DRS applications are rejected.

(3) Generally speaking, buildings that are of higher age are more prone to disrepair. To target these higher risk buildings and to ensure a prudent and orderly use of public fund, the DRS will only accept applications from eligible buildings aged 40 or above as announced. Depending on the response to the scheme and the spending of the approved commitment, we may consider accepting applications from younger buildings at a later stage.

Owners facing financial difficulties but ineligible for the present scheme may consider applying for other existing subsidy/loan schemes without building age restrictions, such as the "Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Needy Owners" and the "Building Safety Loan Scheme". Owners may browse the URA's Building Rehabilitation Platform website (brplatform.org.hk/en) to learn more about the schemes, or call the URA's Building Maintenance Assistance Schemes Hotline 3188 1188 for enquiries.

(4) We understand that "three-nil" buildings (Note) mostly comprise of aged buildings that lack building management and the owners are generally unable to organise building repair works among themselves. Under the DRS, the BD would actively select Category 2 buildings under reference above on a risk-basis and exercise its statutory power to arrange default works consultants and government contractors to carry out the works in default of the owners concerned and recover the remaining balance of the cost involved from owners after deducting the subsidy under the DRS. Owners of "three-nil" buildings may contact the BD should they encounter difficulties in complying with the statutory orders related to common drains. On the other hand, if tenants of subdivided flats in "three-nil" buildings find the drainage system inside their premises defective, they should immediately contact the owners and arrange qualified professionals or contractors to conduct inspections and repairs.

(5) The design, construction, erection, repair, alteration and removal of drainage systems for private buildings are regulated by the Buildings Ordinance (BO) and its subsidiary legislations. For existing private buildings, owners who wish to erect, repair, alter and remove the drainage system in their premises must do so in accordance with the simplified requirements under the Minor Works Control System by appointing suitable contractors registered under the BO so as to ensure that the drainage system in their premises are in compliance with the provisions of the BO and the relevant regulations.

The BD has all along been taking enforcement actions against defective drains through handling reports from the public, referrals from government departments, and carrying out large scale operations against target buildings. If drainage systems are found to be defective, the BD will take appropriate enforcement action in accordance to the BO subject to case circumstances, including issuing drainage repair orders to require owners concerned to carry out the necessary repair works. If the owners fail to

comply with the order without reasonable excuse, the BD may instigate prosecution in accordance to the BO or arrange a default works consultant and government contractor to carry out the specified works in default of the owners, the cost of which plus a supervision charge and surcharge will be recovered from the owners concerned afterwards. Apart from enforcement, the Government also provides technical and financial assistance to needy owners through various schemes. The BD will also continue to organise various public education and publicity activities to heighten the public's awareness towards proper building maintenance.

(6) The URA, as our partner in administering the DRS, will proactively promote the DRS. The URA has reached out to building owners eligible for the initial stage of the DRS in April 2021, informing them of the scheme and inviting them to attend an online briefing at the end of April. The relevant video has been uploaded onto the URA's Building Rehabilitation Platform for public viewing. Moreover, the URA will also promote the DRS on its Building Rehabilitation Platform, as well as through newspaper and radio advertisements.

Note: "Three-nil" buildings refer to buildings which do not have an owners' corporation or any form of owners'/residents' organisations, and have not engaged a property management company.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (May 5), 11 COVID-19 confirmed patients were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 11 462 patients with confirmed or probable infection have been discharged.

At present, there are 616 negative pressure rooms in public hospitals with 1 155 negative pressure beds activated. A total of 88 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in 16 public hospitals and the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, among which three patients are in critical condition, two are in serious condition and the remaining 83 patients are in stable condition.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

The case numbers of the discharged, critical and serious patients are as

follows:

Discharged	7076, 11615, 11624, 11659, 11720, 11737, 11747, 11778, 11781, 11785, 11786
Critical	6794, 8078, 9907
Serious	10358, 11764

[LCQ16: COVID-19 virus testing services](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

To cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, the Government has set up distribution points at 47 general outpatient clinics under the Hospital Authority (outpatient clinics), 121 post offices and 20 MTR stations for members of the public to obtain deep throat saliva specimen collection packs (collection packs). Members of the public may return the deep throat saliva specimens (specimens) collected by themselves to designated collection points at specified hours for the COVID-19 virus testing (testing). In addition, the Government provides testing services for persons of target groups. Some members of the public have complained that the collection packs distributed at the distribution points have been in severe shortage, especially in the Islands District. Regarding the testing services, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the criteria adopted by the authorities for determining (i) the locations of the distribution points, and (ii) the specified hours for collecting the specimens;
- (2) of the current average daily total number of collection packs distributed at the distribution points in each District Council district, and the ratio of such number to the population of the district concerned; whether it will, in districts with a severe shortage of collection packs, expeditiously set up additional distribution points and increase the quantities of collection packs for distribution;
- (3) in respect of the past 30 days, of the average daily (i) time taken for each of the distribution points at outpatient clinics and post offices to finish distribution of all collection packs after commencement of distribution, and (ii) waiting time for members of the public at the

distribution point concerned (set out in a table);

(4) in respect of each of the distribution points at MTR stations in the past 30 days, of the average daily (i) number of collection packs supplied, and (ii) time taken to finish distribution of all collection packs after commencement of distribution (set out in a table); given that at such distribution points there are often long queues for obtaining collection packs and distribution of all collection packs finishes momentarily, whether the authorities will increase the quantities of collection packs for distribution and improve the distribution procedure;

(5) since the commencement of the authorities' services of arranging on-site testing as well as distribution and collection of collection packs for construction site workers and other target groups, of the testing coverage rate and the number of confirmed cases in respect of each group, and whether it will consider designating new target groups; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) of Hong Kong's current maximum testing capacity, and whether it can increase the testing capacity?

Reply:

President,

Virus testing is an integral part of our anti-epidemic strategies. The Government's existing strategy aims to implement and expand the coverage of various testing measures, including requiring specified persons of high risk to undergo compulsory testing on a mandatory basis, arranging targeted groups to undergo testing on an obligatory basis, and encouraging more members of the public to undergo testing on a voluntary basis.

With regard to the Hon Chan Han-pan's question, our reply is as follows:

(1) to (4) The Government has all along been providing convenient testing services to the public through various channels to encourage and facilitate members of the public to undergo testing, so as to achieve the objective of "early identification, early isolation and early treatment" and cut the transmission chains as early as possible.

Starting from late July 2020, to facilitate individuals who perceive themselves as having a higher risk of exposure or experience mild discomfort to undergo free testing, they can collect and return specimen bottles at 22 general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority (HA). The HA has for several times increased the number of GOPCs distributing specimen collection packs, extended the distribution hours of specimen collection packs and installed multiple vending machines. Moreover, since end-November and early-December, more distribution points of specimen collection packs are set up at post offices and MTR stations to further facilitate members of the public to obtain specimen collection packs.

Currently, there are 188 distribution points in 18 districts offering free specimen collection packs. Members of the public can obtain deep throat saliva specimen collection packs at 47 HA GOPCs, 121 post offices or vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations for free, and return their specimens at designated hours to the 47 HA GOPCs, 13 clinics of the Department of Health or 23 specimen collection points at Government premises.

Due to the surge of demand for regular testing from staff of catering business, scheduled premises and construction sector within a short period of time, the number of specimen collection packs distributed was relatively high in late February this year. In view of the surge in demand, we have set up two more community testing centres in March 2021; and the number of tests available for appointments at community testing centres has been increased from the original over 20 000 each day to more than 26 000 and 32 000 in late February and early March respectively, and further increased to more than 38 000 per day now, with more manpower deployed to serve the public. In addition, the Government have worked with testing operators to increase about 20 mobile specimen collection stations in a number of districts to divert the demand of different sectors.

Since last July, the number of specimen collection packs distributed in Hong Kong has been increased substantially. In April 2021, a daily average of around 33 000 specimen collection packs were distributed by the Government, equivalent to 27 times the number last July and August during the third wave of the epidemic (a daily average of around 1 200 packs). Over the past few months, the number of specimen bottles collected by the Government is around half of the amount distributed. The Government calls on the public and organisations to refrain from collecting more sets of packs than needed so that others in need can also obtain specimen collection packs for testing.

Starting from April 29, under the relaxed social distancing measures under "vaccine bubble", staff of catering businesses operating under Types C and D and six types of scheduled premises (namely bars or pubs; clubs or nightclubs; bathhouses; party rooms; karaoke establishments; and mahjong-tin kau premises) who are unfit to receive vaccination because of health reasons must submit a declaration form and present a medical certificate to the employer, and undergo a nucleic acid test using combined nasal and throat swabs every seven days. In other words, they have to undergo testing and specimen collection by combined nasal and throat swabs at community testing centres or mobile specimen collection stations, and they cannot use specimen collection packs to self-collect deep throat saliva specimens, so as to enable individuals who perceive themselves as having a higher risk of exposure or experience mild discomfort to obtain specimen collection packs for testing.

(5) For targeted testing, the Government continues to arrange testing for targeted groups based on risk assessment. At present, testing is being provided continuously for targeted groups including staff and personnel working in markets, licensed hawkers, practitioners of cold stores, designated frontline employees of Kwai Tsing Container Terminals. New targeted groups including foreign domestic helpers, construction site

workers, couriers (including takeaway food couriers) and security and guarding personnel have been added. A total of 1 710 000 tests were carried out under testing for targeted groups from November 15, 2020 to April 28, 2021, equivalent to a daily average of around 10 400 tests with 0.01 per cent tested positive. The Government will regularly review the coverage and frequency of targeted group testing with reference to the latest epidemic risk assessment.

(6) The Government has been stepping up surveillance and testing efforts in a multi-pronged approach. Through the efforts of the Government and the co-operation of the agencies, the current maximum daily testing capacity of public and private laboratories has been substantially increased to approximately 100 000 tests per day (without sample pooling). Through various channels of specimen collection, the Government can collect samples from a maximum of about 80 000 members of the public for testing each day. The Government will continue to proactively leverage the current testing capability to expand further the scale of testing in the community, giving full play to the strategy that all specified persons will be compulsorily tested, while making testing services available as far as possible to targeted groups which should be tested and people who would like to be tested, in order to identify cases as early as possible and cut the transmission chains in the community.

LCQ12: Confirmed cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Pierre Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

Regarding the confirmed cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of cases since January 2020 in which healthcare personnel and allied health professionals (i.e. (i) doctors, (ii) nurses, (iii) physiotherapists, (iv) occupational therapists, (v) clinical psychologists, (vi) dietitians, (vii) audiologists, (viii) optometrists, (ix) orthoptists, (x) speech therapists, (xi) pharmacists, (xii) dispensers, (xiii) radiographers, (xiv) medical laboratory technologists, (xv) medical social workers, (xvi) prosthetist-orthotists and (xvii) podiatrists) as well as (xviii) support personnel working in (a) public hospitals, (b) the Department of Health, (c) private hospitals, (d) private clinics and (e) residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities

were suspected of having contracted COVID-19 arising out of and in the course of their employment, and set out in the table below a breakdown of such number by their occupation and the type of organizations in which they worked;

Occupation	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(i)					
.....					
(xviii)					

(2) whether the Labour Department (LD) has received employers' reports on the confirmed cases mentioned in (1); if so, among such reports, of the number of those in which compensation claims were lodged under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282), together with the following information on such cases:

- (i) the number of cases of successful claims,
- (ii) the number of cases of unsuccessful claims and the main reason(s) for the claims being unsuccessful, and
- (iii) the assistance provided by the Government for those employees whose compensation claims were unsuccessful; and

(3) of the number of cases since October 1, 2020, in which employees lodged compensation claims under Cap. 282 for contracting COVID-19 arising out of and in the course of their employment, together with the following information on such cases:

- (i) breakdown of the number of cases by the industry in which the employees concerned were engaged,
- (ii) the number of cases reported by the employers,
- (iii) the number and percentage of cases of successful claims,
- (iv) the number of cases of unsuccessful claims and the main reason(s) for the claims being unsuccessful, and
- (v) the assistance provided by the Government for those employees whose compensation claims were unsuccessful?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Food and Health Bureau, my reply to Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) For employees who have contracted diseases (including COVID-19) but the infections have not arisen out of and in the course of employment, and the employees have been granted sick leaves supported by appropriate medical certificates, the employers should pay the employees sickness allowance in accordance with the Employment Ordinance and the relevant employment contract terms. These cases are not required to be reported to the

Labour Department (LD) in accordance with the Employees' Compensation Ordinance.

(^An appropriate medical certificate refers to that issued by a registered medical practitioner, a registered Chinese medicine practitioner or a registered dentist. It should specify the number of days on which, and the nature of the sickness or injury on account of which, the employee is unfit for work.)

During January 2020 to April 21, 2021, among the employees' compensation claims with employees suspected to have contracted COVID-19 while at work received by the LD, 56 claims involved employees of the public hospitals, including 3 doctors, 23 nurses, 3 allied health professionals and 27 staff members from the support or executive ranks. Besides, there were 3 cases which involved staff members of the Department of Health, including 1 doctor and 2 ambulancemen.

During the period, the LD also recorded 12 cases reported by private hospitals or private clinics involving 7 nurses, 2 allied health professionals and 3 supporting workers; while care homes for the elderly and people with disabilities reported 47 cases to the LD, including 4 nurses, 33 care workers and 10 supporting workers.

Out of the 118 reported cases mentioned above, employers in 15 cases admitted the liability to employees' compensation and out of which one case was settled after the employer had made payment in accordance with the Certificate of Compensation Assessment issued by the Commissioner for Labour. Besides, employees in 17 cases withdrew their claims or did not pursue further with their claims owing to various reasons. The LD has been actively following up on the remaining 86 cases.

(3) During October 1, 2020 to April 21, 2021, the LD had received a total of 324 employees' compensation claims with employees suspected to have contracted COVID-19 in employment. The breakdown of reported claims by industry is as follows:

Industry	Number of Compensation Claims
Public Administration, Social and Personal Services	140
Finance and Insurance, Real Estate, Professional and Business Services	57
Food and Beverage Services	20
Import/Export, Wholesale and Retail Trades, Accommodation Services	19

Transportation, Storage, Postal and Courier Services, Information and Communications	15
Construction	54
Manufacturing	10
Others	9
Total	324*

(*Out of the 118 reported cases in parts (1) and (2) of the reply, 85 cases were reported during October 1, 2020 to April 21, 2021. These 85 reported cases are included in the 324 reported cases above.)

Among these 324 reported cases, employers in 52 cases admitted the employees' compensation liability and out of which two cases were settled after the employers had made payments in accordance with the Certificate of Compensation Assessment issued by the Commissioner for Labour. Besides, employees in 59 cases withdrew their claims or did not pursue further with their claims owing to various reasons, and one case was subsequently confirmed that the employer did not have the liability to compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance. The LD has been actively taking follow-up actions for the remaining 212 cases.

â€‹The LD has been proactively following up on employees' compensation claims with employees suspected to have contracted COVID-19 in employment based on information published by the Centre for Health Protection. A note on employees' rights and protection under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, together with the contact means of the LD, has been distributed through hospitals to all confirmed COVID-19 patients. In case of disputes over employees' compensation cases, the LD will obtain medical reports and other relevant information and provide its views to the employees and employers concerned on the likelihood of the cases being work injuries from the medical perspective and in accordance with the Employees' Compensation Ordinance. The LD will remind the employers to comply with the relevant labour laws in the course of clarifying the work-relatedness of these reported cases. Injured employees may approach the LD should they require any assistance. The LD will take appropriate follow-up action according to the circumstances of individual cases.