

TD arranges new round of free COVID-19 voluntary testing services for taxi and public light bus drivers and employees of local ferry operators

The Transport Department (TD) announced today (April 23) that starting from Monday (April 26), a new round of COVID-19 voluntary testing services will be arranged for taxi and public light bus (PLB) drivers and employees of local ferry operators.

Testing is an integral part of the strategy in preventing and fighting the virus. The TD will continue the free voluntary testing services for taxi and PLB drivers for a new round covering a period of two weeks from April 26 to May 9. The locations, opening dates and hours of the five designated testing centres are detailed in the Annex.

Taxi and PLB drivers may make an appointment via the dedicated online booking system of the TD (covidtest.td.gov.hk) starting from tomorrow (April 24). When booking an appointment, drivers should provide their Hong Kong identity card number, select a time slot and designated testing centre, and fill in a contact number for receiving SMS notifications. Upon completion of registration, the system will display the booking confirmation and issue an SMS notification that confirms the date and time of the booking, the name of the testing centre and the booking number.

Taxi and PLB drivers who have made an appointment should bring along the original Hong Kong identity card used for booking, a valid taxi driver identity plate or public light bus driver identity plate, and the booking confirmation SMS, and visit the selected testing centre during the appointment time slot. Duty officers of the testing agency will assist drivers with the registration, and collect the specimen of the combined nasal and throat swab test. The testing agency will deliver the specimens collected to the laboratory for testing. As no personal information will be indicated on the specimen bottles, the testing agency will only have records of the barcode number of the specimen bottles and will not collect personal information. Drivers who have a negative test result will receive an SMS notification, while cases with positive test results will be relayed to the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health for follow-up.

Taxi drivers who have completed the testing will be given the Participation Tag for Taxi Drivers at the testing centre and may display the tag at a prominent position inside the taxi compartment for passengers to check.

As for employees of local ferry operators, the ferry operators have already notified their employees to bring along their valid staff identity

cards or letters issued by the ferry operators during specific time slots from April 26 to 29 to undergo testing at specified locations.

The TD appeals to taxi and PLB drivers and employees of local ferry operators to participate in the testing with a view to achieving "early identification, early isolation and early treatment", and cutting the transmission chains in the community as far as possible. For details of the testing services, please visit the website of the TD (www.td.gov.hk).

Moreover, the TD encourages staff of local public transport service operators to participate in the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme as soon as possible to protect themselves, their families and the community as a whole. For details of the Vaccination Programme, please visit the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

Business expectations for the second quarter of 2021

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (April 23) the results of the Quarterly Business Tendency Survey for the second quarter (Q2) of 2021.

Business Situation

For all surveyed sectors taken together, the proportion of respondents expecting their business situation to be better (16%) in the second quarter of 2021 over the preceding quarter is broadly the same as that expecting it to be worse (16%).

When compared with the results of the Q1 2021 survey round, the proportion of respondents expecting a better business situation in Q2 2021 as compared with the preceding quarter has increased to 16%, against the corresponding proportion of 9% in Q1 2021. On the other hand, the proportion of respondents expecting a worse business situation has decreased from 26% in Q1 2021 to 16% in Q2 2021.

Analysed by sector, more respondents in the accommodation and food services sector and manufacturing sector expect their business situation to be better in Q2 2021 as compared with Q1 2021, relative to those expecting a worse business situation. In the construction sector and transportation, storage and courier services sector, however, more respondents expect their business situation to be worse, as compared to those expecting a better business situation.

It should be noted that the results of the survey should be interpreted

with care. In this type of survey on expectations, the views collected in the survey are affected by the events in the community occurring around the time of enumeration, and it is difficult to establish precisely the extent to which respondents' perception of the future accords with the underlying trends. The enumeration period for this survey round was from March 2, 2021 to April 13, 2021.

Volume of Business/Output

Respondents in quite a number of the surveyed sectors expect their volume of business/output to increase on balance in Q2 2021 as compared with Q1 2021. In particular, significantly more respondents in the accommodation and food services sector expect their volume of business to increase in Q2 2021 over Q1 2021. On the other hand, more respondents in the transportation, storage and courier services sector expect their volume of business to decrease, as compared to those expecting it to increase.

Employment

Respondents in quite a number of the surveyed sectors expect their employment to remain broadly unchanged in Q2 2021 as compared with Q1 2021. More respondents in the accommodation and food services sector expect their employment to increase in Q2 2021 over Q1 2021. On the other hand, more respondents in the retail sector and transportation, storage and courier services sector expect their employment to decrease, as compared to those expecting it to increase.

Selling Price/Service Charge

Respondents in most of the surveyed sectors expect their selling prices/service charges to remain broadly unchanged in Q2 2021 as compared with Q1 2021. In the construction sector, however, significantly more respondents expect their tender prices to go down in Q2 2021 over Q1 2021.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that overall business sentiment improved alongside the receding local epidemic situation, with the accommodation and food services sector seeing particularly visible improvement thanks to the relaxation of some social distancing measures since mid-February. Hiring sentiment of most sectors showed signs of stabilisation in tandem.

Looking ahead, the spokesman pointed out that business sentiment can hopefully see a broader based improvement down the road if the local epidemic remains well contained. The Government has unveiled counter-cyclical measures totalling over \$120 billion in the 2021-22 Budget to alleviate the economic hardship caused by the epidemic. The Government will continue to monitor the developments closely.

Further Information

The survey gathers views on short-term business performance from the senior management of about 570 prominent establishments in various sectors in Hong Kong with a view to providing a quick reference, with minimum time lag, for predicting the short-term future economic performance of the local economy.

The survey covers 10 major sectors in Hong Kong, namely manufacturing; construction; import/export trade and wholesale; retail; accommodation and food services (mainly covering services rendered by hotels and restaurants); transportation, storage and courier services; information and communications; financing and insurance; real estate; and professional and business services sectors.

Views collected in the survey refer only to those of respondents on their own establishments rather than those on the respective sectors they are engaged in, and are limited to the expected direction of quarter-to-quarter change (e.g. "up", "same" or "down") but not the magnitude of change. In collecting views on the quarter-to-quarter changes, if the variable in question is subject to seasonal variations, respondents are asked to provide the expected changes after excluding the normal seasonal variations.

Survey results are generally presented as "net balance", i.e. the difference between the percentage of respondents choosing "up" and that choosing "down". The percentage distribution of respondents among various response categories (e.g. "up", "same" and "down") reflects how varied their business expectations are. The "net balance", with its appropriate sign, indicates the direction of expected change in the variable concerned. A positive sign indicates a likely upward trend while a negative sign indicates a likely downward trend. However, the magnitude of the "net balance" reflects only the prevalence of optimism or pessimism, but not the magnitude of expected change, since information relating to such magnitude is not collected in the survey.

Furthermore, owing to sample size constraint, care should be taken in interpreting survey results involving a small percentage (e.g. less than 10%) of respondents in individual sectors.

Chart 1 shows the views on expected changes in business situation for the period Q2 2020 to Q2 2021.

Table 1 shows the net balances of views on expectations in respect of different variables for Q2 2021.

The survey results are published in greater detail in the "Report on Quarterly Business Tendency Survey, Q2 2021". Users can download the publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1110008&scode=300).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Business Expectation Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7263; email: business-prospects@censtatd.gov.hk).

Consumer Price Indices for March 2021

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (April 23) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures for March 2021. According to the Composite CPI, overall consumer prices rose by 0.5% in March 2021 over the same month a year earlier, smaller than the average rate of increase in January and February 2021 (1.1%). The comparison to the average rate of increase in January and February is to neutralise the effect caused by different timing of the Lunar New Year between two years, which occurred in mid-February this year but in late January last year. The smaller increase in the Composite CPI in March compared to January and February combined was attributable to the low base of comparison arising from the Government's payment of public housing rentals and waiver of two-thirds of rent for tenants of Group B estates by Hong Kong Housing Society in January 2020. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rate of change in the Composite CPI (i.e. the underlying inflation rate) in March 2021 was 0.2%, larger than the average rate of change in January and February 2021 (-0.3%). The increase was mainly due to the increases in the costs for meals bought away from home and the prices of pork.

Comparing March 2021 with February 2021, the year-on-year rate of change in the Composite CPI in March 2021 (0.5%) was larger than that in February 2021 (0.3%). Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rate of change in the Composite CPI in March 2021 was 0.2%, also larger than that in February 2021 (-0.1%).

On a seasonally adjusted basis, the average monthly rate of change in the Composite CPI for the 3-month period ending March 2021 was 0.4%, and that for the 3-month period ending February 2021 was 0.0%. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the corresponding rates of change were 0.2% and -0.1%.

Analysed by sub-index, the year-on-year rates of change in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 1.3%, 0.2% and 0.2% respectively in March 2021, as compared to the average rates of change of 3.5%, 0.0% and -0.2% respectively in January and February 2021, and 0.9%, 0.0% and 0.0% respectively in February 2021. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rates of change in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 0.7%, -0.2% and 0.0% respectively in March 2021, as compared to the average rates of change of 0.1%, -0.5% and -0.4% respectively in January and February 2021, and 0.4%, -0.3% and -0.2% respectively in February 2021.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, for the 3-month period ending March 2021, the average monthly rates of change in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 0.5%, 0.3% and 0.2% respectively. The corresponding rates of change for the 3-month period ending February 2021 were 0.2%, 0.0%

and -0.1% respectively. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the average monthly rates of change in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) for the 3-month period ending March 2021 were 0.2%, 0.2% and 0.1% respectively, and the corresponding rates of change for the 3-month period ending February 2021 were 0.0%, -0.1% and -0.2% respectively.

Amongst the various components of the Composite CPI, year-on-year increases in prices were recorded in March 2021 for electricity, gas and water (21.2%); food (excluding meals bought away from home) (3.1%); meals bought away from home (0.7%); alcoholic drinks and tobacco (0.5%) as well as miscellaneous services (0.4%).

On the other hand, year-on-year decreases in the components of the Composite CPI were recorded in March 2021 for transport (-2.3%), durable goods (-1.2%), miscellaneous goods (-0.7%) and housing (-0.5%).

As for clothing and footwear, the Composite CPI remained unchanged over a year earlier.

In the first quarter of 2021, the Composite CPI rose by 0.9% over a year earlier. The respective rates of change in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 2.8%, 0.1% and 0.0%. The corresponding rates of change after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were -0.1%, 0.3%, -0.4% and -0.2% respectively.

For the 12 months ending March 2021, the Composite CPI was on average 0.1% higher than that in the preceding 12-month period. The respective rates of change in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were -0.1%, 0.1% and 0.2% respectively. The corresponding rates of change after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 0.5%, 0.9%, 0.4% and 0.4% respectively.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that underlying consumer prices reverted to a small year-on-year increase of 0.2% in March, mainly due to a faster increase in food prices. Yet, private housing rentals fell further, while price pressures on other major CPI components remained tame.

Looking ahead, overall price pressures should stay mild in the near term, as global and local economic activities have yet to fully recover from the earlier deep recession. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Further information

The CPIs and year-on-year rates of change at section level for March 2021 are shown in Table 1. The time series on the year-on-year rates of change in the CPIs before and after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures are shown in Table 2. For discerning the latest trend in consumer prices, it is also useful to look at the changes in the seasonally adjusted CPIs. The corresponding time series on the average

monthly rates of change during the latest 3 months for the seasonally adjusted CPIs are shown in Table 3. The rates of change in the original and the seasonally adjusted Composite CPI and the underlying inflation rate are presented graphically in Chart 1.

More detailed CPI data (including year-on-year comparison, month-to-month comparison, seasonally adjusted data series and the CPIs by the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP)) are available in the monthly reports. Users can download the March 2021 issue of the "Monthly Report on the Consumer Price Index"

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1060001&scode=270), the time series of CPIs at detailed level

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=D5600001&scode=270), the time series of CPIs at COICOP division level

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=D5600002&scode=270) and the time series of CPIs after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=D5600003&scode=270) at the website of the C&SD.

The current CPI series are compiled based on the expenditure patterns obtained from the 2014/15 Household Expenditure Survey (HES). The 2019/20 HES is being conducted to collect information for updating the expenditure weights of the CPI series and the new 2019/20-based CPI series will be available around mid-2021. As a result of the rebasing exercise, the year-on-year changes of the new 2019/20-based CPI series will be compiled from October 2020 onwards. The year-on-year changes compiled from the new 2019/20-based CPI series may be different from those compiled from the current 2014/15-based CPI series. The 2014/15-based CPI series will continue to be compiled and published until the reference month of December 2021.

For enquiries about the CPIs, please contact the Consumer Price Index Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7374 or email: cpi@censtatd.gov.hk).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Friday, April 23, 2021 is 101.3 (up 0.1 against yesterday's index).

EMSD releases lift and escalator contractors' latest performance ratings

â€‹The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) today (April 23) announced the performance ratings of the registered lift and escalator contractors for the past 12 months (from April 2020 to March 2021) for public reference.

According to the rating results, 34 registered lift contractors and 26 registered escalator contractors were awarded the Safety Star. Among these contractors, 21 registered lift contractors and 17 registered escalator contractors had not been found non-compliant with the safety and maintenance requirements as reported in the last two consecutive announcements of performance results, and were therefore given the highest rating of five Quality Stars. The EMSD conducted 29 064 inspections of lifts and escalators during the period.

The rating results, conviction records, summaries of the warning letters and equipment failure records are available on the EMSD's website (www.emsd.gov.hk/emsd/eng/pps/le_pub_mpr.shtml).