

Update on cluster of Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci cases at Tuen Mun Hospital

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, the spokesperson for Tuen Mun Hospital gave the following update today (April 22):

In accordance with the prevailing infection control guidelines, the hospital has conducted contact tracing. One more patient, a 43-year-old female, was found to be a VRE carrier without any symptoms of infection. The patient had been discharged earlier.

The ward concerned has adopted the following enhanced infection control measures:

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

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

Import of poultry meat and products from areas in Poland and Vietnam suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (April 22) that in view of a notification from the General Veterinary Inspectorate of Poland about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N8 avian influenza in the KÄ™piÅ„ski District and Ostrowski District of Wielkopolskie Region, ElblÄ„ski District of WarmiÄ„sko-mazurskie Region, Sierpecki District of Mazowieckie Region and Malborski District of

Pomorskie Region in Poland, and a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N6 avian influenza in Thái Nguyên Province, Hà Giang Province, Yên Bái Province, Hà Tĩnh Province, Lào Cai Province, Lạng Sơn Province, Hà Tĩnh Province and Đắk Lắk Province in Vietnam, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the above areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that Hong Kong has currently established a protocol with Vietnam for the import of poultry eggs but not for poultry meat. According to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 7.63 million poultry eggs from Vietnam, and about 13 500 tonnes of frozen poultry meat and about 39.08 million poultry eggs from Poland last year.

"The CFS has contacted the Polish and Vietnamese authorities over the issues and will closely monitor information issued by the OIE and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

CSSA caseload for March 2021

The overall Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload in March showed a drop of 763 cases, representing a decrease of 0.3 per cent compared with that of February, according to the latest CSSA caseload statistics released by the Social Welfare Department today (April 22).

The total CSSA caseload at the end of March stood at 223 792 (see attached table), with a total of 319 191 recipients.

Analysed by case nature, low-earnings cases registered a month-to-month decrease of 2.2 per cent to 2 422 cases. Old age cases were down by 0.7 per cent to 128 863 cases.

Unemployment cases increased by 0.4 per cent on a monthly basis to 19 810 cases. The figure represented an increase of about 57.4 per cent in comparison with that of January 2020 when Hong Kong just started to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The average number of applications for unemployment cases in January to March 2021 was 856 per month, representing a reduction of 3.3 per cent from that in December 2020 to February 2021, or a reduction of 15.1 per cent from that in January to March 2020.

Ill-health cases rose by 0.2 per cent to 26 289 cases. Both permanent disability cases and single parent cases increased by 0.1 per cent to 17 502 cases and 24 826 cases respectively.

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for January – March 2021

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for January – March 2021) released today (April 22) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased from 7.2% in December 2020 – February 2021 to 6.8% in January – March 2021. The underemployment rate also decreased from 4.0% in December 2020 – February 2021 to 3.8% in January – March 2021.

Comparing January – March 2021 with December 2020 – February 2021, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) decreased in many major economic sectors, with more distinct decreases observed in the retail, accommodation and food services sector; and human health activities sector. As to the underemployment rate, decreases were mainly seen in the decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings sector; food and beverage service activities sector; and arts, entertainment and recreation sector.

Total employment increased by around 4 000 from 3 610 100 in December 2020 – February 2021 to 3 614 100 in January – March 2021. Over the same period, the labour force also increased by around 2 200 from 3 871 700 to 3 873 900.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) decreased by around 1 800 from 261 600 in December 2020 – February 2021 to 259 800 in January – March 2021. Over the same period, the number of underemployed persons also decreased by around 6 200 from 154 600 to 148 400.

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market was under notable pressure in the first quarter of 2021, but the situation stabilised in the latter part of the quarter as the fourth wave of the local epidemic receded. The unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) edged down by 0.1 percentage point from December 2020 – February 2021 to 6.7% in January – March 2021, and after seasonal adjustment it fell by 0.4 percentage point to 6.8%. The underemployment rate decreased by 0.2 percentage point to 3.8%. Meanwhile, total employment went up slightly by 4 000 over the preceding three-month period to 3 614 100, and the number of unemployed persons decreased slightly by 1 800 to 259 800."

Analysed by sector, the unemployment rate of the consumption- and tourism-related sectors (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors) combined fell by 0.4 percentage point from the preceding three-month period to 10.7% in January – March 2021. Among these sectors, the

unemployment rate for food and beverage service activities declined from 14.1% to 13.3%. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of the human health activities sector decreased notably. Movements of unemployment rates in other sectors varied, but were generally small in magnitude.

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "As the pace of recovery is uneven across sectors and inbound tourism remains in the doldrums, the labour market may still face challenges in the near term. Nevertheless, if the local epidemic situation continues to be contained, the operating environment for consumer-facing economic sectors may improve and this should help ease the pressure on the labour market. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely."

He pointed out that in order to enhance job-matching, the Labour Department (LD) will strengthen its liaison with employers with recruitment needs, and organise more thematic job fairs for different sectors (including the property management sector and elderly care services sector etc.) to help job-seekers secure employment. Furthermore, the LD launched the Racial Diversity Employment Programme in November 2020, commissioning non-governmental organisations to strengthen employment support for ethnic minority job-seekers.

Meanwhile, the LD continues to receive and release information on vacancies from various industries for job-seekers with different educational background and working experience. In March 2021, the LD recorded a total of 84 421 vacancies from the private sector, representing an increase of 50.1% over both figures in February 2021 and March 2020. Job-seekers may make use of the LD's online platforms such as the Interactive Employment Service website for obtaining such vacancy information.

Further Information

The unemployment and underemployment statistics were compiled from the findings of the continuous General Household Survey.

The survey for January – March 2021 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 73 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong. Labour force statistics compiled from this sample represented the situation in the moving 3-month period of January to March 2021.

Data on labour force characteristics were obtained from the survey by interviewing each member aged 15 or over in the sampled households.

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour Organization.

Statistical tables on the latest labour force statistics can be downloaded at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=D5250021). More

detailed analysis of the labour force characteristics is given in the "Quarterly Report on General Household Survey" which is published four times a year. The latest issue of the publication contains statistics for the quarter October – December 2020 while the next issue covering the quarter January – March 2021 will be available by end May 2021. Users can also download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=B1050001).

For enquiries about labour force statistics, please contact the Household Statistics Analysis Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5508 or email: ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, April 22, 2021 is 101.2 (down 0.2 against yesterday's index).