

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (April 13), 13 COVID-19 confirmed patients were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 11 227 patients with confirmed or probable infection have been discharged.

At present, there are 658 negative pressure rooms in public hospitals with 1 214 negative pressure beds activated. A total of 130 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in 20 public hospitals and the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, among which seven patients are in critical condition, two are in serious condition and the remaining 121 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.

Details of the above-mentioned patients are as follows:

Patient condition	Case numbers
Discharged	9055, 11101, 11251, 11439, 11473, 11476, 11493, 11510, 11511, 11541, 11558, 11571, 11585
Critical	1989, 6607, 6794, 8078, 9907, 10358, 10942
Serious	6386, 7468

LegCo to consider Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

The Legislative Council (LegCo) will hold a meeting tomorrow (April 14) at 12.30pm in the Chamber of the LegCo Complex. During the meeting, the Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021 will be introduced into the Council for the First Reading and the Second Reading. The

Second Reading debate on the Bill will be adjourned.

The agenda of the above meeting can be obtained via the LegCo Website (www.legco.gov.hk). Members of the public can watch or listen to the meeting via the "Webcast" system on the LegCo Website. To observe the proceedings of the meeting at the LegCo Complex, members of the public may call 3919 3399 during office hours to reserve seats.

Special visiting arrangement to resume in eight infirmary hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) announced today (April 13) that the special visiting arrangement will resume in eight infirmary hospitals next Wednesday (April 21).

"Given the easing situation of the epidemic recently, the HA will resume the special visiting arrangement in phases. The initial phase covers eight infirmary hospitals (see details in the Appendix), where each patient will be allocated a one-hour visiting session by one designated relative every week. Ward staff will begin contacting patients' families in the next few days for scheduling the visits. The visiting quotas are subject to the actual operation of the individual wards. A change of visitor is not allowed within the one-hour session," the HA spokesperson said.

To minimise the infection risk for inpatients and staff, one-off visitors are required to present a negative COVID-19 nucleic acid test result obtained within 72 hours before the scheduled visit. Regular visitors can choose to conduct weekly testing. For visits arranged under urgent circumstances, the visitor must provide a test result within two days after the visit.

"As more citizens are getting vaccinated, visitors who have completed two-dose COVID-19 vaccination for at least 14 days can opt for rapid antigen testing within 24 hours before the visit. The visitors have to purchase the COVID-19 rapid antigen test and conduct it at home on their own. The visitors need to take a photo of the person being tested with the negative results and the time and date of the test. The photo, the packing and product insert of the rapid antigen test kit and the vaccination record need to be shown together to the ward staff for checking before entering the ward. For details, please browse the HA webpage," the spokesperson said.

To further safeguard the safety of patients and healthcare workers,

visitors entering public hospitals are required to comply with the infection control measures, such as wearing surgical masks, temperature checking and filling in health declaration forms.

"Visitors can scan the Hospital Visit QR code and fill in the health declaration form within 24 hours before the visit and show the QR code generated by the system to the ward staff. The updated version of the Hospital Visit QR code will be displayed on the HA website and in the mobile app 'HA Go'.

"Both the HA Central Command Committee and the HA Central Committee on Infectious Disease and Emergency Responses have decided to resume the special visiting arrangement following prudent deliberation and assessment. The arrangement will be reviewed with due consideration to the latest epidemic situation and will be further extended to other hospitals and wards if the situation allows," the spokesperson added.

The HA hopes the community can understand that visiting arrangements can only be made with certain restrictions under the current epidemic situation. Meanwhile, other hospitals and wards will continue to facilitate compassionate visiting arrangements and video visiting as far as practicable. In addition, visitors are encouraged to scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code displayed at all public hospitals for complete personal records of their visits. <

SFST's speech on public finance at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the English translation of the speech by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, on public finance at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 13):

Chairman and Honourable Members,

This session of the special meetings of the Finance Committee will examine the expenditure estimates of the Treasury Branch and related departments. Before the question session begins, I would like to brief Members on a few points.

Estimates of expenditure

The estimated total expenditure of the Treasury Branch and the departments under its purview for 2021-22 is about \$50.434 billion, representing a decrease of \$34.077 billion (about 40 per cent) over the original estimate of \$84.511 billion for last year. The decrease is mainly attributed to a drop in the estimated non-recurrent expenditure under Head 147 of the Treasury Branch by \$33.852 billion (about 45 per cent). The estimate for last year covered the one-off non-recurrent expenditure on the Cash Payout Scheme, the estimated expenditure of which is also higher than that on the consumption voucher scheme to be launched this year. Discounting the non-recurrent expenditure, the estimated total recurrent expenditure of the Treasury Branch and the departments under its purview this year is \$9.204 billion, which is \$260 million (about 3 per cent) less than the original estimate for last year.

Key areas of work

I would like to speak briefly on a few key areas of work in the coming year.

Firstly, on public finance, we will continue to exercise fiscal prudence to ensure that the financial commitments are commensurate with the increase in revenue, so as to maintain healthy public finance. In the past year, we have increased government expenditure substantially to combat the epidemic and roll out relief measures. As proposed in the 2021-22 Budget, we will continue to implement countercyclical fiscal measures to support the economy and alleviate people's hardship. A fiscal deficit of over \$100 billion is envisaged for 2021-22 and deficits are also projected in the Medium Range Forecast for the coming few years. As far as expenditure is concerned, we will have zero growth in the civil service establishment in this financial year. Furthermore, we will implement an expenditure reduction programme in 2022-23 with the aim of trimming recurrent expenditure by 1 per cent without affecting livelihood-related spending. As regards revenue, Hong Kong needs to maintain the development and vibrancy of our economy and identify new areas of growth, with a view to increasing our revenue. We also need to consider seeking new revenue sources or revising tax rates, and reducing one-off relief measures progressively. Having duly considered the impact on the securities market and our international competitiveness, we have decided to raise the rate of Stamp Duty on Stock Transfers. It is expected that government revenue will increase as a result. Having regard to the prevailing economic environment and the impact of the epidemic, we consider that it is not the appropriate time to revise the rates of profits tax and salaries tax. That said, we will keep in view the situation and make adjustments at the appropriate time. As fighting the epidemic and reviving the economy are our current priorities, this is also not the time to introduce new taxes. Nevertheless, we will carry out related research and make preparations to facilitate in-depth discussions at a suitable time, and forge consensus before introducing new taxes to increase revenue.

Secondly, on international tax co-operation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is drawing up new proposals to address base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS 2.0), which include a global minimum

tax rate and a digital tax. We will actively implement the BEPS 2.0 proposals according to international consensus; strive to maintain the simplicity, certainty and fairness of our tax regime, which are our key advantages; minimise the compliance burden on affected corporations; and keep up our efforts in improving Hong Kong's business environment and enhancing our competitiveness. The Advisory Panel on BEPS 2.0 will submit a report to the Government after the proposals are finalised. We will then study the report carefully with a view to formulating specific response measures.

Thirdly, on the rating system, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Rating and Valuation Department are reviewing the rating system, including the case for introducing a progressive element to the rating system, providing rates concession for owner-occupied properties on a regular basis, and shifting the primary liability for rates payment from the occupier to the owner of a property. Our target is to consult the relevant panel of the LegCo within this year on whether and how to revise the rating system.

Furthermore, the Financial Secretary has announced in the Budget that electronic consumption vouchers with a total value of \$5,000 would be disbursed by instalments to each eligible Hong Kong permanent resident and new arrival aged 18 or above, so as to encourage and boost local consumption. This initiative is expected to benefit around 7.2 million eligible persons. Many Members were concerned about the scheme in the last session. We are working in full swing on the preparatory work, and as announced on Sunday, a number of stored value facility operators have been selected to help implement the scheme. We will continue to discuss the workflow and arrangements with the operators and other collaborating departments. The coverage of the consumption voucher scheme will be as extensive as possible to include different local businesses in the retail, food and beverage, and service sectors and the like. The registration procedures and the entire workflow design of the scheme will follow the principles of simplicity, convenience and security. We will announce the details as soon as possible, with the current target of commencing registration in this summer vacation.

Chairman, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions from Members.

Thank you.

Import of poultry meat and products from areas in Germany and Poland

suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (April 13) that in view of notifications from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and a notification from the General Veterinary Inspectorate of Poland respectively about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N8 avian influenza in the Districts of Weimarer Land, Saale-Holzland-Kreis, Sömmerda, Saalfeld-Rudolstadt, Weimar, Jena and Erfurt of the State of Thüringen as well as Wolfenbüttel District of the State of Niedersachsen and Berlin in Germany, and Rzeszowski District of Podkarpackie Region in Poland, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the above-mentioned areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 3 900 tonnes of frozen poultry meat and about 1.41 million poultry eggs from Germany 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 German and Polish 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.