

Community vaccination centres to provide some 2 000 jobs for travel trade (with photo)

Starting from May 1, the Government's Job Creation Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund will provide up to 2 000 short-term jobs for a period of around five months for practitioners in the travel trade to be responsible for the operation and administrative work at 24 community vaccination centres (CVCs) which are not operated by private hospitals.

The Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, today (March 29) met with representatives of the travel trade to listen to their proposal and reached a consensus with the trade on the scheme.

"Lasting for over a year, the epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to various trades including the tourism industry. Many practitioners of the travel trade have to face the problems of being laid off or underemployment, which have seriously affected their livelihood. Therefore, when the travel trade put forward a proposal to the Government, my colleagues and I immediately liaised and discussed with the trade to gauge their views and to map out details of the measure to create short-term jobs within a short period of time. It is hoped that the measure would help to address the imminent needs of some practitioners of the trade," Mr Nip said.

"The work of practitioners in the travel trade includes registration, briefing and crowd management, etc. They also need to deal with unexpected events very often. Such experience and skills are similar to that of the management and administrative support work required in the CVCs. It is expected that they will be able to take up the work at the CVCs soon after receiving a short period of training and familiarisation. The inoculation and medical-related duties will continue to be handled by professional medical staff."

Eighteen organisations in the travel sector including the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, the Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners and the Hong Kong Hotels Association will set up an administrative supporting company to conduct the recruitment work. The scheme is expected to create about 1 400 to 2 000 jobs. Eligible applicants include tour guides, tour escorts, staff of travel agents, staff of hotels, drivers of coaches and the like. The appointees will be employed for a period of around five months from May 1, and the monthly salaries will range from \$10,000 to \$40,000 depending on whether they work full-time or part-time and the positions they hold. The estimated cost of the scheme is about \$150 million.

To relieve the worsening unemployment situation due to the epidemic and the anti-epidemic measures, the Government has earmarked \$6.6 billion under the Anti-epidemic Fund last year to create about 30 000 time-limited jobs in

the public and private sectors within two years for people of different skill sets and academic qualifications. In view of the persistently high unemployment rate, the Government announced in the 2021-22 Budget to further earmark \$6.6 billion to create about 30 000 additional time-limited jobs.

Relevant government departments will liaise with non-governmental organisations or relevant associations under their purview to formulate details of the additional jobs. As at end February 2021, around 31 000 jobs have been created, with half of the jobs being created in the Government and the other half in the non-governmental sector. Among the jobs already created, around 18 000 jobs have been filled while the recruitment of the remaining 13 000 jobs is in progress or will commence shortly. More than 30 per cent of the jobs created are suitable for young people or have been created for fresh graduates, with more than 40 per cent of them being relatively junior positions. The major types of jobs created include technical and non-skilled workers, cleaning and supporting staff, staff providing administrative, executive and clerical support, as well as jobs related to anti-epidemic work.

Currently, the Government deploys manpower from various departments to perform the operation and management work at the CVCs. Since the CVCs will continue to operate for a period of time, the provision of administrative support by the travel trade will allow for a more flexible deployment of manpower, and civil servants who have been deployed to the CVCs earlier will return to their original posts and continue to provide services to the public.



[Transcript of remarks by SFH at media session \(with video\)](#)

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau; and the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, met the media on the latest social distancing measures at a media session today (March 29). Following is the transcript of

remarks by the Secretary for Food and Health:

Reporter: Firstly, on the easing of some of the restrictions before the Easter holiday, you have mentioned that it is a very critical period. Why couldn't we just wait until after the holiday before easing the restrictions for some of these venues? Secondly, on vaccination exemptions, is there any consideration about exempting people who have been vaccinated two jabs plus 14 days from maybe the mandatory close contact quarantine as well? Do you have any information on when the BioNTech jab might also be available back in Hong Kong? Thirdly, on the travel arrangements, is there any consideration as to the choice of vaccines that people take where they will be able to travel in the future?

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your questions. First of all, as I have said earlier, we are very careful in terms of our social distancing measures. We are basically not relaxing, we are just adjusting some of the situations that we have already open, for example, the theme parks and also some of the places whereby we have assessed very carefully the risk and the risk is not high. Therefore, we think in the coming 14 days there are some situations that can have some adjustments.

Regarding the scheduled premises under Cap 599F, we maintain largely what is already relaxed. Although we notice that after our earlier relaxation, there are clusters in the restaurants as well as the gym, but given all our stringent measures and also the increased capacity that we have built up throughout the last few months in terms of testing, in terms of contact tracing and also in terms of our facilities' capabilities, we are confident that if there are major outbreaks, we would be able to deal with it. Therefore we decide to maintain but not close down these scheduled premises. This is our position.

As far as the exemption is concerned, regarding the every 14 days regular testing, with enough supply of vaccines in Hong Kong, and with the consolidation of all the work that we have done so far, and also with the risk assessment, we have come to the decision that if people have vaccinated, it can replace the 14-day regular testing of staff of the scheduled premises under Cap 599F. We have also communicated with the Education Bureau and the Development Bureau, for teachers, if they have got vaccinated, then it can also replace their current testing arrangements, and the same with the construction workers.

As far as BioNTech is concerned, during the weekend we have already issued the press release to state the current situation. The Department of Health, and the Food and Health Bureau have been working very closely with Fosun and BioNTech. First of all, they have already confirmed that the situation that we have identified – some of the packaging defects – would not have anything to do with the safety of the vaccine. But some testing is going on. We hope, and they have already told us, that hopefully within the coming week, we will be able to have a final report. So hopefully we can resume the vaccination shortly.

The third question is about travel arrangement, it is about how countries look at the type of vaccines that people have vaccinated. For people coming from abroad, how are we going to confirm that they are vaccinated? I think obviously we would have to look at what vaccines are authorised by their country. I think this is the most important that whatever vaccine people are vaccinated, they are authorised by the health authority of the country concerned.

Reporter: First of all, about the adjustment of the social distancing measures, experts had said that currently the epidemic situation in Hong Kong is not yet stable. Professor Chan, are you worried that such adjustment will lead to a quick rebound of infections. And on the shortening of quarantine period for people from low-risk countries, when will such arrangement come into effect? And also about the arrangement of bringing back stranded Hong Kongers in the UK in late April, approximately how many flights and how many Hong Kongers that are expected to benefit from this arrangement as well? And also on the BioNTech vaccine, Professor Chan, you have mentioned that we are seeing possibly a final report in the coming week, but could you tell Hong Kong people when they could receive the BioNTech vaccine again at the earliest time, because such supply will actually affect the vaccination rate in Hong Kong as well. Thank you.

Secretary for Food and Health: A few questions, first of all, as I said earlier, the announcement of our continuation of the social distancing measures is not a relaxation. So we are doing minor adjustments on some of the activities that we have very carefully assessed the risk, and this is also something that is related to people's mental health, so we are not only looking at physical health. We are also very careful about the scheduled premises, so we want to maintain the current scheduled premises opening, and not to open any more at this point of time further as the coming 14 days is critical and also crucial in terms of our efforts, sustaining our efforts to control the epidemic situation as well as hopefully to strive for zero cases.

Number two, your question about when can we start the reduction of quarantine on the low-risk countries. I think within this week, we will send out more details of the reduction of quarantine period. Not only the reduction of the quarantine period from 21 days to 14 days, but we have also put in place testing, for example, testing on day 19, and also they must go through "test and hold" at the airport, plus 14 days' quarantine, plus self-monitoring for another seven days. So we will announce the details sometime within this week and hopefully we can start within next week. So it is about in two weeks' time.

Third is about the UK situation. We agreed that some people (Hong Kong residents) are stranded in the UK because we have the boarding restriction earlier. We are going to lift that boarding restriction. We are working closely with the airlines to have a few flights for these people to come back to Hong Kong. It would take some time – hopefully it would happen towards the end of April. We are still working very closely with the airlines. Again, we are also putting in further restrictions, for example "test and hold" at the airport, and also regular testing on day seven, day 12 and day 19, and they

must all be quarantined in a designated hotel for 21 days, and so on and so forth. Again, within this week, we will issue a press release to give out all the details.

Finally, your question about BioNTech. As I have said, we are actually communicating with them more than once per day. We are working very closely with them to ensure that they give us their report as soon as possible because this suspension is ordered by the manufacturer. We have already issued a press release on the initial findings that are reassuring. We hope to resume the injection, hopefully, within this week. But at this point of time, I cannot say on which day of the week because we still have not got the report, but we will chase them almost every hour. Thank you.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

Measures to assist foreign domestic helpers and employers to cope with COVID-19 pandemic extended

â€‹The Government today (March 29) announced that the measures to assist foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) and their employers to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic will be extended with immediate effect.

Extension of validity period of existing contracts

The Government will continue to implement the previous measure to enable employers to extend the validity period of the existing contracts with their outgoing FDHs. For all FDH contracts that will expire on or before June 30, 2021, the Commissioner for Labour has given in-principle consent for extending the employment period stated in Clause 2 of the Standard Employment Contract for a maximum period of three months, on the basis that such variation is agreed upon by both the employer and the FDH. However, applications for further extension of those contracts which have already been extended under the previous flexibility arrangements including that announced on December 30, 2020 will not be considered.

Based on the experience from the previous flexibility arrangements, a three-month extended period could allow sufficient time for employers to arrange their newly hired FDHs to come to Hong Kong. If a newly hired FDH cannot be arranged to come to Hong Kong within the three-month extended period and the employer needs to continue to employ his/her FDH beyond the three-month extended period, the employer should apply for a contract renewal with the existing FDH. It is an employer's duty to make advance preparations to arrange their newly hired FDHs to come to Hong Kong within the three-month

extended period of employment of their existing FDHs and/or arrange for contract renewal with their existing FDHs.

Deferral of return to the place of origin

Under the prevailing mechanism, an FDH on a renewed contract with the same employer, or due to start a new contract with a new employer upon the expiry of an existing contract, may apply to the Immigration Department (ImmD) for deferring return to the place of origin for not more than one year after the existing contract ends, subject to agreement of his/her current employer or new employer.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government will further extend the relevant flexibility arrangement announced on December 30, 2020. If an FDH is unable to return to his/her place of origin within the aforementioned one-year period, he/she may, upon agreement with his/her employer, apply to the ImmD for a further extension of limit of stay until the end of his/her contract such that he/she may return to the place of origin within that period.

If FDHs who have already been granted further extension of stay under the previous flexibility arrangements announced by the Government on March 21, June 30, September 30 and December 30, 2020 wish to further defer their return to the place of origin, they may still apply to the ImmD for a further extension of limit of stay in Hong Kong until the end of their contract such that they may return to the place of origin within that period.

The Government reminds employers and FDHs that the above flexibility arrangement must be mutually agreed between the employer and the FDH, and that the requirement that FDHs should return to their place of origin continues to be in place. Employers should arrange their FDHs to return to the place of origin within the extended limit of stay.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the situations and review the above measures and flexibility arrangements as and when necessary.

Meanwhile, the Labour Department (LD) and the ImmD will continue to adopt proactive measures to combat "job-hopping" of individual FDHs. The LD has initiated an investigation into each complaint about employment agencies (EAs) inducing FDHs to job-hop and conducted joint operations with the ImmD to inspect the relevant EAs. The LD has also issued letters to all EAs of FDHs to remind them that they should not encourage or induce FDHs to job-hop through improper business practices. The ImmD will continue to step up efforts to combat "job-hopping" by FDHs rigorously. For suspected "job-hopping" cases, the ImmD will refuse the employment visa applications concerned and require the applicants to leave Hong Kong.

For enquiries on employment rights and benefits, please contact the LD at the dedicated FDH hotline at 2157 9537 (manned by "1823") or by email to fdh-enquiry@labour.gov.hk. The dedicated FDH Portal (www.fdh.labour.gov.hk) set up by the LD also provides information and useful

links relating to the employment of FDHs. For enquiries on FDH visa applications, please contact the ImmD by calling the enquiry hotline at 2824 6111 or by email to enquiry@immd.gov.hk.

DH receives one report of serious adverse event relating to COVID-19 vaccination

The Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 4pm today (March 29), one death case, reported as a suspected serious adverse event following COVID-19 vaccination, had been received from the Hospital Authority (HA) in the past 24 hours.

According to the information provided by the HA, the case involved a 61-year-old man who was a chronic smoker. He attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital on March 27 due to chest pain and left shoulder pain. He was subsequently admitted to the intensive care unit and suddenly developed ventricular tachycardia and cardiac arrest. He did not respond to resuscitation and passed away yesterday afternoon (March 28). The provisional cause of death is acute myocardial infarction. According to information, he received his first dose of CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccination at Yuen Wo Road Sports Centre Community Vaccination Centre in Sha Tin 12 days (March 16) prior to the date of death and there was no record that the man complained of feeling unwell during observation at the Vaccination Centre.

The DH immediately contacted the HA upon notification to obtain further information on the incident for conducting investigation and assessment. According to the established mechanism, the DH will provide the case to the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation for conducting causality assessment.

According to the World Health Organization, Adverse Events Following Immunisation refers to any untoward medical occurrence that follows immunisation and that does not necessarily have a causal relationship with the usage of the vaccine. As a whole population, people with acute medical conditions of various severities are admitted to hospitals every day. With the commencement of the vaccination programme, it is anticipated that more patients with acute medical conditions will have received vaccines and reports of such cases might increase with the increasing vaccination uptake. It is important for the surveillance system in place to monitor these adverse events following COVID-19 vaccination and to conduct causality assessment based on a scientific and objective approach to ensure that any untoward outcome would not go unnoticed.

According to the mortality rates in Hong Kong, there were 3 740 deaths due to ischaemic heart diseases, including acute myocardial infarction, in 2019. In addition, according to the information of the HA, in 2020 the number of hospital admissions due to myocardial infarction was about 7 300 cases. People with chronic illness should seek medical attention if they feel unwell. They should also adhere to their treatment as prescribed by their doctors.

Two company directors sentenced to 160 hours' community service orders for contravening Employment Ordinance

Two directors of Yuen Fat Lung Group Company Limited were prosecuted by the Labour Department (LD) for failing to pay two employees' wages and the sums awarded by Labour Tribunal (LT) in contravention of the Employment Ordinance (EO). The two directors pleaded guilty earlier at Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts and were each sentenced to 160 hours' community service order today (March 29).

The company failed to pay wages to the two employees as required by the EO, and the total awarded sum of about \$57,000 within 14 days after the date set by the LT. The directors concerned were convicted for their consent, connivance or neglect in the above offences.

"The ruling helps disseminate a strong message to all employers, directors and responsible officers of companies that they have to pay employees' wages within the time limit stipulated in the EO and awarded sums as ordered by the LT or the Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board," a spokesman for the LD said.

"The LD will not tolerate these offences and will continue to make dedicated efforts in enforcing the law and safeguarding employees' statutory rights," the spokesman added.