

CHP investigates 10 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, March 24, the CHP was investigating 10 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 11 420 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 11 419 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, six are imported cases and one is a local case with unknown sources while the remaining three cases are epidemiologically linked with local cases.

A total of 289 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (March 10 to 23), including 221 local cases of which 42 are from unknown sources.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

As a passenger flight (AI 1310) operated by Air India from Delhi in India to Hong Kong on March 22, 2021 had five passengers confirmed to have COVID-19 through specimens collected at the DH's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre, the DH thus invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit the landing of passenger flights from Delhi operated by Air India in Hong Kong from March 24 to April 6, 2021.

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited specified venues under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid testing according to the compulsory testing notice. The Regulation also requires all household members of close contacts of confirmed cases to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test within a specified period according to compulsory testing notices published in the Gazette. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop and undergo testing as soon as possible.

The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

The CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They

should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The spokesman said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps). After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an

effective alternative;

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
 - When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.
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Clubhouse relating to dance cluster fined for violations of anti-epidemic regulation

A licensee of a clubhouse located at 3/F, Golden Era Plaza, Mong Kok, Kowloon, was fined \$20,000 at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts today (March 24) for contravening the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F).

The courts heard that in November last year, the clubhouse did not comply with relevant requirements and directions issued by the Secretary for Food and Health in relation to the clubhouse under Cap. 599F. The non-compliance included not having taken all reasonable steps to ensure that all persons within the clubhouse were wearing masks, having arranged live performances at the premises while some performers were not wearing masks, and not having effective buffers between the performers and any guest/audience member. According to earlier information from the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, the clubhouse was related to the outbreak of the dancing-linked cluster at the end of last year.

A spokesman for the Home Affairs Department (HAD) stressed that clubhouses with a Certificate of Compliance issued by the HAD are one of the scheduled premises under Cap. 599F requiring compliance with the relevant requirements and directions issued by the Government. Persons responsible for scheduled premises that contravene the statutory requirements under Cap. 599F would have committed a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The HAD will continue to proactively take stringent enforcement actions and step up inspections at clubhouses in various districts across the territory to ensure that the responsible persons of the premises and the patrons strictly comply with relevant provisions in the regulations for the prevention and control of diseases. The Government appeals to members of the public for their full compliance with various anti-epidemic requirements so as to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the community.

S for IT briefs I&T sector on Hong Kong's opportunities under National 14th Five-Year Plan (with photo)

The Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, today (March 24) held two virtual seminars to brief the innovation and technology (I&T) sector on the opportunities brought about by the 14th Five-Year Plan. During the seminars, Mr Sit shared the Government's efforts in promoting I&T and the latest developments of co-operation with the Mainland, and exchanged views on issues of mutual concern with the participants. It is hoped that Hong Kong can be developed into an international I&T hub and integrated into national development with collaboration from various sides. The Permanent Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Ms Annie Choi, also joined the seminars.

The 14th Five-Year Plan indicates clear support for Hong Kong's development into an international I&T hub as well as taking forward the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). For the first time, the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Loop is included as a major platform of co-operation in the GBA. All these fully demonstrate the Central Government's unwavering support for Hong Kong's I&T development. Hong Kong will make good use of the unique advantages under "one country, two systems" and its solid science and technology foundation to seize opportunities brought about by the development of the GBA, to integrate into national development, to participate in the "domestic and international dual circulation" and continue to leverage its strengths to serve the country's needs. The Innovation and Technology Bureau will work at full steam to take forward relevant work, including the joint development of the Shenzhen/Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Co-operation Zone, which comprises the Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Zone and the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park by governments of the two cities, with a view to establishing "one zone, two parks" at "one river, two banks" under the auspices of "one country, two systems"; the development of the flagship I&T project, InnoHK research clusters, to further consolidate Hong Kong's position as a global research collaboration hub; and to facilitate the cross-boundary exchange of innovative elements.

Mr Sit believed that I&T development can help diversify and give new impetus to Hong Kong's economy. A stable environment is needed for I&T development in Hong Kong. The passage of the Decision on improving the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by the National People's Congress (NPC) ensures the continuous development and restores the constitutional order in Hong Kong. He encouraged participants to speak up for the NPC's decision and is glad to see that many people and organisations in the sector support improving the electoral system, the implementation of "patriots administering Hong Kong" and ensuring the

steadfast and successful implementation of "one country, two systems".

Hong Kong academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, universities, research and development centres, related I&T organisations and trade associations were invited to the virtual seminars. Some 50 organisations/academicians have joined the seminars today.



LCQ7: Subsidy schemes implemented for the catering outlets

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

Regarding the various subsidy schemes implemented for the catering outlets by the Government under the Anti-epidemic Fund, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the total number, as at the 4th of this month, of those subsidy applications for which approval has been given but subsidies have not been disbursed, and the amount of subsidies involved;
- (2) when the disbursement of the relevant subsidies is expected to be completed;
- (3) of the expected balances of the relevant commitments upon completion of processing the applications under the various subsidy schemes; and
- (4) whether it will consider making good use of the sum mentioned in (3) to provide further subsidies for operators of nightclubs, karaoke establishments and bars whose businesses have likewise been hard hit by the epidemic and the

anti-epidemic measures?

Reply:

President,

The business of catering premises is hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of this, the Government has launched four rounds of subsidy schemes for the catering sector under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) since February 2020 to provide instant financial relief for the trade. The total amount of subsidies approved so far is around \$11.6 billion.

My reply to the question raised is as follows:

(1) and (2) As at 4 March 2021, the Food Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme launched by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department under the first round of the AEF was completed and the subsidies for all approved cases, amounting to around \$3.7 billion, were disbursed. The Scheme has benefited about 29 000 catering premises.

The Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme rolled out under the second round of the AEF disburses subsidies to catering premises providing dine-in services in two tranches. The Scheme mainly seeks to assist the applicants in paying the salaries of their staff from May to July 2020 and from August to October 2020. Upon receiving the first tranche of the subsidy, the applicant has to submit, within the specified time frame, documents certifying that there was no layoff of staff from May to July 2020 and no less than 80 per cent of the subsidy was used for payment of the salaries for staff in order to receive the second tranche of the subsidy. The first tranche of the subsidy, which involved around \$2.2 billion, has been fully disbursed. The second tranche of the subsidy has been disbursed to most approved applications, which involved around \$1.9 billion, and there are only 16 approved applications which are yet to be disbursed with subsidy, involving around \$3 million.

As for the Catering Business Subsidy Scheme under the third and fourth rounds of the AEF, around \$1.4 billion and \$2.1 billion have been disbursed respectively, and there are two and around 1 300 applications, involving around \$110 million, still being processed respectively. The disbursement of subsidies is expected to complete by end of this month.

(3) The sum reserved for various subsidy schemes benefiting the catering sector under the four rounds of the AEF has been adjusted according to the actual application situation. Any balance would be handled according to the established mechanism.

(4) Facing the hard hit brought by the pandemic, we understand that various sectors of the community would wish the Government to provide additional relief. Currently, fees payable for food business licences, the karaoke establishment permit/licence and the liquor/club liquor licence are waived in support of the relevant operators. In considering different demands for

subsidies, the Government must ensure proper use of resources and exercise fiscal prudence.

Latest situation of postal services to Australia

Hongkong Post announced today (March 24) that, as updated by the postal administration of Australia, due to flooding, all mail delivery services (including Speedpost) to New South Wales and Queensland for areas with the postcodes listed below are subject to delay.

| Areas | Postcodes |
|-----------------|--|
| New South Wales | 2126, 2154, 2400, 2424, 2426, 2427, 2430, 2440, 2441, 2453, 2578, 2750, 2751, 2752, 2753, 2756, 2775, 2795, 2818, 2822, 2825, 2826, 2828, 2829, 2839, 2840, 2869, 2877 |
| Queensland | 4114, 4128, 4207, 4209, 4210, 4211, 4212, 4213, 4214, 4215, 4216, 4217, 4218, 4220, 4223, 4226, 4228, 4229, 4270, 4272, 4275, 4370, 4371, 4372, 4373, 4470, 4500, 4503 |