

HA's response to media enquiries on non-locally trained doctors

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

In response to media enquiries on non-locally trained doctors, the spokesperson for the Hospital Authority (HA) replied as follows today (February 4):

Sustainability of public healthcare services has always been the HA's key concern and a topic under study. Hence, the HA welcomes any suggestions in increasing healthcare manpower.

The HA will study the proposal in detail when more specific information is available. It will communicate with both internal and external stakeholders with a view to upholding the professional standard of public healthcare services in meeting public expectations and heavy service demand.

The HA will continue to enhance medical manpower through various measures, including the recruitment of all suitable medical graduates from local universities, and to continue to recruit non-locally trained doctors to work in public hospitals under limited registration.

Transcript of remarks by SLW on additional measures to assist financially needy individuals and families (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on additional measures to assist financially needy individuals and families this afternoon (February 4):

Reporter: Mr Law, can you just explain a little bit about the latest relaxation for the Working Family Allowance (WFA)? How many people do you think that this relaxation will help? How many people will benefit from this change? Why have you not considered setting up a temporary unemployment fund as many have suggested to actually help those people who are unemployed rather than underemployed, because many people are right now unable to find a job at all? About the scrapping of the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (I-WITS), how many people do you think will be affected by

this change? Will it make it even more difficult for these underemployed individuals to get a subsidy after you have made the policy change.

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: Let me explain the measures that we are going to propose to the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council (LegCo) in the coming days. The first measure that we are going to propose is to lower the basic working hour requirement for the WFA from 144 hours to 72 hours. The major purpose is to address the concern during these days when a lot of people cannot work full-time and have to take no pay leave. Under these circumstances, a lot of families or individuals, because of this situation, apart from reduced income, they may lose the eligibility to apply for the WFA and therefore we consider it is timely to propose the lowering of that basic working hour requirement to 72 hours.

The second measure is related to the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects. We normally call it the food bank programme. Again, many individuals who have lost their income would hope to have some kind of short-term relief for the food cost, but then partly because their own asset level may have exceeded the current eligibility standard, therefore they are not able to receive such temporary assistance. So, we propose to increase the asset limit for the eligibility of the food bank programme. Basically, it is more than double for different cases. The whole idea is really hoping that this food bank programme can provide temporary relief for those families who may be affected by unemployment or underemployment.

As to the question for them to have temporary unemployment benefits, I probably have answered this question in written form or oral questions in the LegCo for I just can't remember how many times already, but basically I repeated from time to time. Firstly, in this whole world, no country, no government has ever provided a non-means tested or non-contributory unemployment benefit. It is very interesting that people in Hong Kong have been advocating for such a scheme that no one else in this world will do. Secondly, there are two alternatives (people suggested) in terms of temporary (assistance), either time-limited or when the unemployment rate drops to a certain level then we drop this programme. In the former case, when there is a time limit, let's say at the end of this year, it will be a very difficult policy decision to say that we can only help those who are unemployed on December 31 this year but not the ones who are unemployed on January 1 next year. They are equally needy in terms of the circumstances. It will also prompt their employers who are planning to make redundancy in January to advance it to December so that their employees can benefit from the so-called time-limited temporary unemployment benefits, because that would be a large sum of money, six months of \$9,000 will be \$54,000. That is a lot of money. If the second option is to limit (the eligibility) by a certain criterion, such as when the unemployment rate drops to a certain level then we stop it, let's say at 4 per cent, it will be very difficult in the policy terms that we should support the ones who are unemployed at 4 per cent of unemployment rate but not the ones who are unemployed at the unemployment rate of 3.99 per cent, because they are actually in the same situation. Although the general economy is slightly different, their difficulty would be the same, so this is not the way forward.

In fact, we do have a system already in place, the severance payment and long service payment. If you compare to other countries like the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, our severance payment and long service payment are about 2.9 times of the amount the employers in these other countries have to pay, so that is very substantial and the maximum amount is \$390,000 for severance payment or long service payment. Also, for those who have no sufficient means to meet their basic living, we do have a programme to help them, that is the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme. So, we do not consider a temporary one sounds meaningful in policy terms or practical in policy terms, so we are not contemplating this particular measure. But we, as I repeatedly said in the LegCo, we will try every effort to see what we can do under existing measures and existing programmes, and how to provide additional and better help to those who are needy. These two initiatives I announce today to be proposed to the LegCo are along that direction.

Reporter: Can you elaborate about the I-WITS because many people may not be able to apply for transport subsidy in the future? How many people will be affected by this change?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: Currently, 95 per cent of those who are receiving I-WITS have their monthly working hours exceeding 72, in fact 64 per cent of them actually exceeding 144 hours per month. If we look at the information that we have, we do consider almost all of them would be eligible to apply for WFA. Probably one of the major reasons for not doing that is they have been repeatedly applying for the same allowance without taking the trouble of providing additional information so as to apply for a much higher benefit from the WFA. Even for those who may not be qualified to receive the WFA, they, as any individual in Hong Kong, can be benefited from the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme that is available to every citizen in Hong Kong.

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

Government makes “restriction-testing declaration” and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified “restricted area” in Mong Kok

The Government today (February 4) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 8pm, under which people (hereafter referred to

as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Mong Kok (i.e. Mandarin Court, 647-651 Shanghai Street, Mong Kok. see Annex.) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about 7am tomorrow (February 5), in order to achieve the goal of zero cases in the district with concerted efforts.

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'."

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 0.00am tomorrow. Persons subject to compulsory testing will be arranged to undergo nucleic acid testing at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons, or make arrangements for them to self-collect and submit the deep throat saliva specimens.

"We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible at night after most people are released from work. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around 7am tomorrow with a view to allowing residents to start going to work at around 7am. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

Persons in the "restricted area" who have undergone testing from February 1 to 4, 2021, and are able to provide the SMS notification through a mobile phone or related certification containing the test results, are not required to take the test again. However, they are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. Also, according to the compulsory testing notice issued today, any person who had been present at the above buildings for more than two hours from January 22 to February 4, 2021, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing by February 6.

In order to maintain public and emergency services within the "restricted area", certain working staff (such as healthcare officers and other officers, testing service providers engaged by the Government, and cleaning service providers) are allowed to enter and leave the "restricted

area" on the condition that personal information and contacts are given, as well as certain infection control instructions are followed (including undergoing testing before leaving the "restricted area" without the need to wait for the test results).

The Government has prepared simple food and basic cleaning supplies for the residents restricted by the declaration. The Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2835 1473) and a dedicated hotline (Tel: 3755 6816) for ethnic minorities. The hotline services started operation at 8pm today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government understands the residents in the district are worried and anxious because of the increase in confirmed cases in recent days. Under the epidemic, businesses in the area have been hit hard and brought to a standstill. Residents' livelihoods are also affected. The Government hopes this temporary inconvenience will completely cut the local transmission chains and ease residents' worries and fear, so that they will regain confidence in resuming social and business activities in the area, and return to a normal life.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the restriction-testing declaration is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

CHP investigates 22 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, February 4, the CHP was investigating 22 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 10 553 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 10 552 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, three are imported cases.

A total of 733 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (January 21 to February 3), including 685 local cases of which 253 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).

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 public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop.

Regarding the severe epidemic situation, 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, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use. 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;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- 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.

CHP closely monitors three human cases of avian influenza A(H5N6) in Mainland

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) is today (February 4) closely monitoring three human cases of avian influenza A(H5N6) in the Mainland, and again urged the public to maintain strict personal, food and environmental hygiene both locally and during travel.

The first case involved a 3-year-old girl living in Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province, who had exposure to dead poultry and a live poultry market before onset. She developed symptoms on November 21, 2020, and was admitted for treatment on November 28. The patient passed away on December 22.

The second case involved a 1-year-old girl living in Fuyang in Anhui Province, who had exposure to a live poultry market before onset. She developed symptoms on December 22, 2020, and was admitted for treatment on the same day.

The third case involved a 51-year-old man living in Chongqing, who had slaughtered live poultry and had exposure to a live poultry market before onset. He developed symptoms on December 18, 2020, and was admitted for treatment on the same day.

From 2014 to date, 29 human cases of avian influenza A(H5N6) have been reported by Mainland health authorities.

"All novel influenza A infections, including H5N6, are notifiable infectious diseases in Hong Kong," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Travellers to the Mainland or other affected areas must avoid visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms. They should be alert to the presence of backyard poultry when visiting relatives and friends. They should also avoid purchasing live or freshly slaughtered poultry, and avoid touching poultry/birds or their droppings. They should strictly observe personal and hand hygiene when visiting any place with live poultry.

Travellers returning from affected areas should consult a doctor promptly if symptoms develop, and inform the doctor of their travel history for prompt diagnosis and treatment of potential diseases. It is essential to tell the doctor if they have seen any live poultry during travel, which may imply possible exposure to contaminated environments. This will enable the doctor to assess the possibility of avian influenza and arrange necessary investigations and appropriate treatment in a timely manner.

While local surveillance, prevention and control measures are in place, the CHP will remain vigilant and work closely with the World Health Organization and relevant health authorities to monitor the latest developments.

The public should maintain strict personal, hand, food and environmental hygiene and take heed of the advice below when handling poultry:

- Avoid touching poultry, birds, animals or their droppings;
- When buying live chickens, do not touch them and their droppings. Do not blow at their bottoms. Wash eggs with detergent if soiled with faecal matter and cook and consume the eggs immediately. Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling chickens and eggs;
- Eggs should be cooked well until the white and yolk become firm. Do not eat raw eggs or dip cooked food into any sauce with raw eggs. Poultry should be cooked thoroughly. If there is pinkish juice running from the cooked poultry or the middle part of its bone is still red, the poultry should be cooked again until fully done;

- Wash hands frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, before handling food or eating, and after going to the toilet, touching public installations or equipment such as escalator handrails, elevator control panels or door knobs, or when hands are dirtied by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing; and
- Wear a mask if fever or respiratory symptoms develop, when going to a hospital or clinic, or while taking care of patients with fever or respiratory symptoms.

The public may visit the CHP's pages for more information: the [avian influenza](#) page, the weekly [Avian Influenza Report](#), [global statistics and affected areas](#) of avian influenza, the [Facebook Page](#) and the [YouTube Channel](#).