

Government announces new arrangements for sale of New Year flowers

â€œIn view of the volatile epidemic situation, the Government has earlier decided to cancel this year's Lunar New Year (LNY) fairs, and has been maintaining communication with the trade to explore various feasible measures with a view to minimising its impact on the trade. The Government understands the demands of the trade and the public for sale and purchase of New Year flowers, and announced today (January 19) the new arrangements for the sale of New Year flowers.

Under the premise of upholding the anti-epidemic principles, the Government has to keep the risk of the sale event of New Year flowers under control when responding to demands of the community. After careful consideration, the Government has decided to reduce the scale of the sale of New Year flowers so as to reduce the risk of group gatherings. For the convenience of flower farmers and the public, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will set up points of sale at the 15 sites originally designated for the LNY fairs, and will arrange the successful bidders of the stalls to sell New Year flowers and potted plants at the same venue. The number of stalls at the sites will be reduced by approximately half.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The points of sale of New Year flowers will be opened during the period from February 6 to February 11. Stall operators may use the sites for free, but must comply with the ground rules and anti-epidemic measures, e.g. provision of hand sanitisers at stalls, provision of a list of staff and their contact information for tracing of confirmed cases, etc.

"To make our anti-epidemic efforts effective, the footfall at points of sale will be monitored with the use of technology and various anti-epidemic measures will be strictly enforced. Stall operators and their staff at points of sale will also be required to undergo virus testing within 48 hours before the opening of the points of sale. The FEHD will provide one-off free testing services for them," the spokesman added.

The FEHD will brief the original successful bidders of the LNY fair stalls tomorrow on the arrangements.

Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern

Hospital announces passing away of COVID-19 patient

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesman for Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH) today (January 19) announced that a patient confirmed with COVID-19 passed away today.

A 67-year-old male patient (case number: 7424) with chronic diseases was sent to the Accident & Emergency Department of PYNEH on December 10 last year due to shortness of breath. He was subsequently tested positive for COVID-19 and admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. His condition continued to deteriorate and he eventually succumbed at 5.41pm today.

The hospital is saddened about the passing away of the patient and would offer the necessary assistance to his family.

Including the above patient, 161 COVID-19 confirmed patients have passed away in public hospitals so far.

Transcript of remarks by SLW on increasing number of statutory holidays progressively

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on increasing progressively the number of statutory holidays under the Employment Ordinance after attending a meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Manpower this afternoon (January 19):

Reporter: About the statutory holidays proposal, why there is a lack of consensus between the employers and workers at the Labour Advisory Board (LAB)? Why pushing the proposal to the LegCo when there is no consensus? The second question, after learning from the moves today, how likely is that going to become a model for other labour issues such as the minimum wage as well?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: On the issue of aligning the number of statutory holidays with general holidays, there is little difference in terms of whether we should align the two sets of holidays. There is very little difference in terms of when we should start this process. Yet, there is no

consensus at all whether we can do it in a shorter or much longer time.

In making any decisions related to labour rights or labour benefits which affect the whole society, it is very important for us to consult the LAB, so that they would be able to arrive at some kind of consensus, and that is very difficult. Yet, when once a consensus is made, it is very important and in fact very useful, because if it can undergo a sort of negotiation process where the employers and employees can come to a consensus, it will be an important thing that the Government would keep to that consensus. At the end of the day, to make any changes in our legislation, it is the responsibility of the Government to make proposals, not the LAB, so at the end we still have to bear that responsibility.

In the past, when there is a consensus between the employers and employees through the LAB, the Government will see it as very important. When the LegCo makes amendments to such changes, we may have to go back to the LAB. But then, when we have to make a judgement as for the situation where there is apparently no consensus, and it is not likely there will be a consensus in a foreseeable future, then the Government would have the responsibility to make a decision, to take the proposal forward.

What we are proposing, we consider it will definitely resolve the conflicts or controversy for more than a decade about this alignment of statutory holidays with general holidays. It is important to take into consideration the concerns of the employers, particularly those micro-enterprises and also individual families who employ foreign domestic helpers. So, the proposal that we have made is to complete this process of alignment within about eight years. Indeed, it is a slow process, but we would consider it would be much easier for the micro-enterprises and the employers as a whole to adjust to such changes. It would be more likely to be accepted by both the employers and employees in the LegCo. So, we will proceed after consulting the Panel on Manpower with the legislative process. When we complete our internal process, we will present the Bill to the LegCo.

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

CHP investigates 56 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, January 19, the CHP was investigating 56 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 9 721 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 9 720 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, one is imported case.

A total of 647 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (January 5 to 18), including 608 local cases of which 205 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 one preliminary positive case of COVID-19 today involved a unit 13 above the 12th floor at Hiu Fung House, Fung Wah Estate in Chai Wan, the DH will further issue quarantine orders to all asymptomatic residents of units 13 between 13th floor and 34th floor of Hiu Fung House and transfer them to quarantine centres, after considering opinions from experts as a prudent measure on infection control before relevant departments completed their inspection of the pipes of the building. Symptomatic residents will be sent to the hospital for treatment.

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.

AFCD's special work arrangements starting from January 21

â€‹In light of the special work arrangements for government employees announced by the Government, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (January 19) announced that starting from Thursday

(January 21), the Animal Management Centres of the AFCD (except for the New Territories South Animal Management Centre, which has been launched as another quarantine facility for pet animals related to COVID-19 cases) will provide limited anti-rabies dog inoculation and dog licensing services. Members of the public are required to make appointments in advance by calling the respective Animal Management Centre during office hours whereas all other Anti-Rabies Dog Inoculation and Licensing Centres will remain closed until further notice. For appointment phone numbers and other details, please visit the designated website: www.pets.gov.hk.

The AFCD's licensing services counters at Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices (CSWGO) and the Marine Parks Office at CDW Building, 388 Castle Peak Road, Tsuen Wan, will remain suspended until further notice.

A spokesman for the AFCD appealed to the public to handle their licence or permit applications online or through email, post or fax. Relevant documents can also be put in the drop-in box placed at the ground floor of CSWGO. For detailed information and contacts, please refer to the AFCD website: www.afcd.gov.hk.

Meanwhile, AFCD public facilities including the Hong Kong Wetland Park, eight Country Park Visitor/Education Centres, seven Hong Kong Geopark Visitor Centres, the Endangered Species Resource Centre, and all barbecue sites and campsites of country parks will remain closed until further notice.

For enquiries, please call the AFCD on 2708 8885.