

## **Labour Department occupational health public talks cancelled**

In view of the latest local epidemic situation, the Labour Department announced today (January 14) that the following occupational health public talks scheduled to be held at the respective venues have been cancelled to reduce the flow of people and social contact. Enrolled participants will be informed of the cancellations.

January 21: Chemical and Occupational Health (Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Space Museum)

January 25: First Aid in the Workplace (Lecture Theatre, Hong Kong Central Library)

January 26: Manual Handling Operation and Prevention of Back Injuries (Lecture Theatre, Hong Kong Central Library)

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## **Ombudsman probes into effectiveness of rodent prevention and control by Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (January 14) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the effectiveness of rodent prevention and control by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

The Government's rodent prevention and control work is important, as it can affect people's everyday life. Currently, the Pest Control Teams of the FEHD are responsible for rodent prevention and disinfection in public places. Their major duties include conducting rodent infestation rate (RIR) surveys, carrying out inspections at places with potential risks of rodent infestation, such as rear lanes and illegal refuse disposal blackspots, and taking necessary preventive and control measures. The FEHD also provides training and technical support for other government departments regarding rodent prevention and control at public venues and premises under their management.

However, there are public views that the FEHD's rodent control has been ineffective and that the Department's RIR surveys have failed to reflect the actual situation, leading people to believe that the rodent infestation situation is not serious.

Ms Chiu noted, "Rodent infestation can cause a nuisance to the daily life of the general public and spread different types of serious diseases. I have noticed the wide media coverage about the grave problems of rodent infestation in a number of markets managed by the FEHD last year. Moreover, it is of concern that since the world's first case of human infection of rat Hepatitis E virus was found in Hong Kong in 2018, more than 10 cases had been recorded as at December 2020. In view of the situation, I have decided to initiate a direct investigation to examine the effectiveness of the FEHD's rodent prevention and control work and make recommendations for improvement where necessary."

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to provide information and views on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by February 14, 2021:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre  
168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong

Fax: 2882 8149

Email: [complaints@ombudsman.hk](mailto:complaints@ombudsman.hk)

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## **Key statistics on service demand of A&E Departments and occupancy rates in public hospitals**

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

During the winter surge, the Hospital Authority is closely monitoring the service demand of Accident and Emergency Departments and the occupancy rates in public hospitals. Key service statistics are being issued daily for public information. Details are in the attached table.

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## **Construction site workers can make appointments for free COVID-19 testing service**

The Food and Health Bureau announced on January 13 that the Government will provide one-off free COVID-19 voluntary testing service to all

construction site workers in Hong Kong from January 15 to January 31 via online booking. Booking for the relevant service can be made starting from today.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "There were a number of confirmed cases involving construction site workers recently. In order to reduce transmission risk of COVID-19 in the community, in addition to the compulsory testing notices issued for individual construction sites, the Government will offer one-off free COVID-19 testing service to all construction site workers in Hong Kong through community testing centres."

"We encourage construction site workers to actively participate in the free voluntary test to safeguard their health and that of their families and co-workers. The free testing service will be available until end-January. Construction site workers can choose a suitable time slot taking into account their own needs."

"If construction site workers have symptoms, they should seek medical attention immediately and undergo free testing provided by the Government as instructed by a medical professional. They should not attend the community testing centres."

Construction site workers should make advance booking for the free testing service via the community testing centre booking system ([www.communitytest.gov.hk](http://www.communitytest.gov.hk)). Those who did not make an appointment will need to pay for the testing service at \$240.

The community testing centres are open daily from 8am to 1.30pm and from 2.30pm to 8pm. Deep cleaning and disinfection will be conducted when they close in the afternoon and at night. When arriving at the community testing centre at the designated time slot, construction site workers should present identity document used at the time of booking (such as Hong Kong identity card or passport), their construction worker registration card issued by the Construction Industry Council and the SMS booking confirmation for verification.

The free voluntary testing service will be offered starting from January 15 and last until January 31. During the period, each construction site worker can receive free testing service once only. Participants will be notified of a negative test result by SMS through their mobile phones. If there is any specimen tested with preliminarily positive COVID-19 result, it will be referred to the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Department of Health (DH) for a confirmatory test. Confirmed cases will be followed up and announced by the Centre for Health Protection of the DH.

In addition to attending the community testing centres for testing, construction site worker can continue to utilise other free testing channels provided by the Government, including obtaining a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from post offices, MTR stations or designated general outpatient clinics of the Hospital Authority and return the specimen to the designated specimen collection points. For details on other testing means

than community testing centres, please refer to the following webpage: [www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html). The voluntary testing service at construction sites arranged by the Construction Industry Council and the Hong Kong Construction Association will continue in parallel.

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## CHP reminds public on precautions against cold weather

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 14) reminded the public, particularly the elderly and people with chronic illnesses, to adopt appropriate measures to protect their health in view of the cold weather.

A spokesman for the CHP said that cold weather can easily trigger or exacerbate diseases, especially among the elderly and persons suffering from heart disease, respiratory illness or other chronic illnesses.

"Elderly people have less insulating fat beneath their skin to keep them warm and their body temperature control mechanism may be weaker. Their body may not be able to appropriately respond to the cold weather," the spokesman said.

Some senior persons may have decreased mobility, which can in turn slow down their ability to generate and conserve body heat. Chronic illnesses, such as hypertension, diabetes and endocrine disorders, may undermine the health of elderly people and lower their metabolic rate, subsequently causing their body to generate less heat.

The CHP reminded the public, in particular the elderly and persons with chronic illnesses, to adopt the following preventive measures:

- Take note of the weather forecast. Wear warm clothing, including hats, scarves, gloves and socks accordingly;
- Consume sufficient food to ensure adequate calorie intake;
- Perform regular exercise to facilitate blood circulation and heat production;
- Stay in a warm environment and avoid prolonged outdoor exposure;
- Use heaters with care and maintain adequate indoor ventilation; and
- Seek medical advice if feeling unwell.

In addition, the public should avoid alcoholic beverages.

"Drinking alcohol cannot keep you warm. Alcohol accelerates the loss of body heat through dilated blood vessels, resulting in chilling instead," the spokesman said.

"Parents should ensure that babies are sufficiently warm, but it is also important to keep babies lightly clothed to avoid overheating them," the spokesman added.

Parents should observe the following safety measures when putting their children to bed:

- Keep the room well ventilated and with a comfortable temperature;
- Always place babies on their back to sleep. Babies usually sleep well without a pillow;
- Place babies on a firm and well-fitted mattress to sleep. Avoid soft objects and loose bedding;
- Leave their head, face and arms uncovered during sleep; and
- Let babies sleep in a cot placed in the parents' room and near their bed.

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

- A surgical mask can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;
- 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;
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose;
- 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.
- Receive seasonal influenza vaccination, which is recommended for all persons aged 6 months or above except those with known contraindications; and
- Persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive seasonal influenza vaccination early. Please see details of the vaccination programmes and

scheme on the CHP's website.

Food-borne diseases, particularly those linked to hot pot cuisine, are also common in cold weather. The following preventive measures should be taken:

- Wash hands before handling and consuming food;
- Do not patronise unlicensed vendors or those with poor hygienic standards while selecting food;
- Wash and cook all food thoroughly;
- Vegetables should be washed thoroughly in clean running water before cooking and consumption. When appropriate, scrub vegetables with hard surfaces with a clean brush to remove dirt and substances, including pesticide residues and contaminants, from the surface and crevices;
- Shrimps should be fully cooked by cooking them until the shells turn red and the flesh turns white and opaque;
- For shellfish like scallops and geoduck, scrub the shells thoroughly and remove internal organs;
- Most hot pot ingredients should be stored in a refrigerator at 4 degrees Celsius or below, while frozen food should be stored in a freezer at -18 degrees C or below;
- Never use raw eggs as a dipping sauce for hot pot; and
- Use different sets of chopsticks to handle raw and cooked food to avoid cross-contamination.

In addition, the public should not use charcoal as a cooking fuel in poorly ventilated areas, especially indoors, to avoid harmful exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) and prevent CO poisoning. While using other kinds of fuel, the public should also ensure adequate ventilation.

For more health information, the public may call the DH's Health Education Hotline (2833 0111) or visit the [CHP's website](#) and [Facebook Fanpage](#).

The public may also call Dial-a-Weather (1878 200) or visit the website of the [Hong Kong Observatory](#) for the latest weather information and forecast, or its page on [Weather Information for Senior Citizens](#).