

Employers and employees should take precautions during cold weather

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following special announcement immediately, and repeat it at frequent intervals when the Cold Weather Warning is in force:

The Labour Department reminds employers that as the Cold Weather Warning is in force, they should take appropriate precautions such as reminding employees who have to work outdoors or in remote areas to wear appropriately warm clothing, and make arrangements for employees to rotate from outdoor to indoor or sheltered work sites as far as possible. Employees should take note of the weather report, wear appropriately warm clothing and be mindful of their health conditions. They should notify their supervisors and seek medical help immediately if feeling unwell, such as having cold limbs and body shivering.

DH's Yaumatei Maternal & Child Health Centre closed for disinfection tomorrow

The Department of Health (DH) today (January 13) said that its Yaumatei Maternal & Child Health Centre (MCHC) learnt that a COVID-19 patient had earlier visited the MCHC. The MCHC will be closed for thorough cleaning and disinfection tomorrow (January 14). Staff will contact affected clients to reschedule their service appointments.

The patient visited the Yaumatei MCHC on January 11 and was confirmed with COVID-19 infection today. The DH's Centre for Health Protection has initiated an epidemiological investigation on the case and relevant contact tracing are ongoing.

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In view of the current epidemic situation, MCHC has stepped up infection control measures, including temperature screening before clinic entry, limiting number of accompanying carers etc. At present, all MCHC staff members are wearing mask at work and practising hand hygiene at all times. The DH is highly concerned about the COVID-19 situation and has reminded all staff again to maintain personal hygiene and be vigilant at all times. If feeling unwell, they should seek medical attention immediately.

Enhancement of Return2hk Scheme online booking system

The Government today (January 13) announced that, having regard to the booking and immigration clearance situation since the implementation of the Return2hk Scheme, it has been decided that starting from 0.00am of January 14, the online booking system will be open for booking 24/7 to facilitate members of the public to apply for available quotas through the system anytime. Once the new arrangement is in place, members of the public can immediately apply for quotas for the period between January 14 and January 24. Thereafter, the system will make available the quotas for the seven-day period of the following week for booking every Wednesday at 0.00am. For example, from 0.00am of January 20, members of the public can begin to apply for the quotas for the period between January 20 and January 31.

To implement the new booking arrangement, the Return2hk Scheme online booking system will be temporarily suspended tomorrow (January 14) from 0.00am for about 30 minutes for system upgrading.

The Government spokesman reminded that Hong Kong residents who return to Hong Kong under the Return2hk Scheme should fulfill all the specified conditions in order to be exempted from the 14-day compulsory quarantine requirement upon their return to Hong Kong, including not having been to places other than Hong Kong, Guangdong Province or Macao in the past 14 days; being able to present the proof of a valid negative nucleic acid test result conducted in any medical institutions located in the Guangdong Province or Macao that are mutually recognised by the governments of Hong Kong and Guangdong / Hong Kong and Macao upon arrival; holding a quota of the Return2hk Scheme and return to Hong Kong on the date and at the boundary control point as specified in the booking. To ensure smooth immigration clearance at the boundary control points, returning Hong Kong residents should transmit their valid negative nucleic acid test result to the electronic health declaration system of the Department of Health through "Yuekang Code" or "Macao health code" and to fill in other required information to obtain the "Green" QR code within 24 hours before setting off to Hong Kong.

Details of the Return2hk Scheme are available at the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (return2hk.gov.hk or www.gov.hk/return2hk). Members of the public may also call the hotline of the Return2hk Scheme at 3142 2330 if they have any enquiries.

Ten persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operation

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a territory-wide anti-illegal worker operation codenamed "Swordfish" today (January 13). A total of six suspected illegal workers and four suspected employers were arrested.

During the operation, ImmD investigators raided over 10 target locations including a restaurant, a warehouse, retail shops, a farm and an industrial building. The suspected illegal workers comprised one man and five women, aged 24 to 43. Among them, four persons were foreign domestic helpers (the Helper), one person was an overstayer and one person was a holder of recognisance form which prohibits her from taking up employment. Meanwhile, two men and two women, aged 39 to 63, were suspected of employing the suspected illegal workers. ImmD investigators found the suspected illegal workers on the target locations performing different jobs, including delivery, goods retailing and cleaning, etc.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman reiterated that the Helper should only perform domestic duties for the employer specified in the contract. The Helper should not take up any other employment, including part-time domestic duties, with any other person. The employer should not require or allow the Helper to carry out any work for any other person.

In addition, the spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective

employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

Kwong Wah Hospital announces a patient confirmed positive to COVID-19

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH) made the following announcement today (January 13) concerning a patient confirmed with COVID-19 (case number: 9359):

A 23-year-old female patient attended the Accident and Emergency Department in the afternoon on January 11 due to gynecological problem. She did not present with fever and other respiratory symptoms. Admission screening of COVID-19 test had been arranged for the patient according to the established guidelines. The patient was then transferred to the Gynaecology Ward for treatment. The result of COVID-19 test was indeterminate in the same evening. As a precautionary measure, the hospital had transferred the patient to the isolation ward immediately. The test result was confirmed positive by the Department of Health on January 12. The patient is in stable condition.

Upon contact tracing, one patient who had stayed in the same cubicle with the COVID-19 confirmed patient was being classified as a close contact and had been transferred to the isolation ward. All staff members who

provided care for the COVID-19 confirmed patient were equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment. As a result, none of the staff members was being classified as a close contact.

A thorough cleaning and disinfection had been arranged in the ward concerned. The hospital would continue to closely monitor the health condition of staff and patients and communicate with the Centre for Health Protection about the latest situation.