

HAD opens temporary cold shelters

In view of the cold weather, the Home Affairs Department has opened 18 temporary shelters today (January 13) for people in need of the service.

The temporary shelters have been operating since last Thursday (January 7), and will remain open during the daytime tomorrow (January 14) when the cold weather warning is still in force.

To ensure that cold shelter users can rest in a quiet and undisturbed environment, members of the public or agencies wishing to make donations to shelter users are requested to register with the staff of the shelter first. Donors will then be directed to place the donated items at a specified indoor location. The staff will help notify the shelter users to collect the items on their own.

Anyone seeking temporary refuge or with any questions about the donation arrangements at the cold shelters may call the department's hotline 2572 8427 for more information.

The 18 temporary cold shelters are located at:

Hong Kong Districts:

Central and Western:

Sai Ying Pun Community Complex Community Hall
3/F, Sai Ying Pun Community Complex, 2 High Street, Sai Ying Pun

Eastern:

Causeway Bay Community Centre
3/F, 7 Fook Yum Road, Causeway Bay

Southern:

Lei Tung Community Hall
Lei Tung Estate, Ap Lei Chau

Wan Chai:

Wan Chai Activities Centre
LG/F, Wan Chai Market, 258 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai

Kowloon Districts:

Kowloon City:

Hung Hom Community Hall
1/F, Kowloon City Government Offices, 42 Bailey Street, Hung Hom

Kwun Tong:

Lam Tin (West) Estate Community Centre
71 Kai Tin Road, Lam Tin

Sham Shui Po:
Nam Cheong District Community Centre
1 Cheong San Lane, Sham Shui Po

Wong Tai Sin:
Tsz Wan Shan (South) Estate Community Centre
45 Wan Wah Street, Tsz Wan Shan

Yau Tsim Mong:
Henry G Leong Yaumatei Community Centre
60 Public Square Street, Yau Ma Tei

New Territories:

Islands:
Tung Chung Community Hall
G/F, Tung Chung Municipal Services Building,
39 Man Tung Road, Tung Chung

Kwai Tsing:
Tai Wo Hau Estate Community Centre
15 Tai Wo Hau Road, Kwai Chung

North:
Cheung Wah Community Hall
Cheung Wah Estate, Fanling

Sai Kung:
King Lam Neighbourhood Community Centre
King Lam Estate, Tseung Kwan O

Sha Tin:
Lung Hang Estate Community Centre
Lung Hang Estate, Sha Tin

Tai Po:
Tai Po Community Centre
2 Heung Sze Wui Street, Tai Po

Tsuen Wan:
Lei Muk Shue Community Hall
G/F, Hong Shue House, Lei Muk Shue Estate, Tsuen Wan

Tuen Mun:
Butterfly Bay Community Centre
Butterfly Estate (near Tip Sum House), Tuen Mun

Yuen Long:
Long Ping Community Hall
Long Ping Estate, Yuen Long

LCQ18: Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 13):

Under the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, the Government provides health care vouchers (HCVs) of a total value of \$2,000 on January 1 each year to eligible elderly people aged 65 or above to subsidise them in using the private primary healthcare services provided by healthcare professionals. The unused HCVs each year may be retained for use in future, but the excess above the limit of accumulated value (which has been increased from \$4,000 in 2014 to \$5,000 and \$8,000 in 2018 and 2019 respectively) will be forfeited. Some elderly people have relayed recently that they used healthcare services less last year due to the rampant epidemic, which resulted in some of their HCVs being forfeited. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) among the eligible elderly people, of the number and percentage of them who used HCVs, in each of the past three years;
- (2) of the number of elderly people who had HCVs under their names forfeited in each of the past three years because the accumulated value of their HCVs had exceeded the limit, as well as the total value of HCVs involved; and
- (3) whether it will consider raising the limit of accumulated value of HCVs to \$10,000, so that the elderly people may use HCVs to obtain more healthcare services when the epidemic is over; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government launched the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) in 2009 to provide subsidies for eligible elders to choose private primary healthcare services in their local communities that best suit their health needs. Currently, vouchers can be spent on healthcare services provided by medical practitioners, Chinese medicine practitioners, dentists, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, radiographers, medical laboratory technologists, chiropractors and optometrists with Part I registration under the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (Cap.

359).

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Leung Che-cheung is as follows:

(1) The number of eligible elders who had used vouchers under the Scheme in the past three years and the percentage out of the eligible elderly population are set out below:

	2018	2019	2020
Cumulative number of elders who had used vouchers by the end of the year	1 191 000	1 294 000	1 350 000
Number of eligible elders (i.e. elders aged 65 years or above)*	1 266 000	1 325 000	1 376 000
Percentage of elders out of the eligible elderly population who had ever used vouchers	94%	98%	98%

*Source: "Hong Kong Population Projections 2017-2066" from the Census and Statistics Department

(2) The number of elders who had voucher amounts forfeited on January 1 of 2019, 2020 and 2021 due to the voucher amount in their voucher accounts exceeding the accumulation limit and the corresponding amount of vouchers involved are set out below –

	January 1, 2019	January 1, 2020 (Note)	January 1, 2021
The number of elders who had voucher amounts forfeited due to the voucher amount in their voucher accounts exceeding the accumulation limit	266 000	–	182 000
Total amount of vouchers forfeited due to the exceeding of the accumulation limit (HK\$ thousand)	310,737	–	229,966

Note: The accumulation limit of vouchers was \$5,000 on January 1, 2019. An additional \$1,000 worth of vouchers was provided, on a one-off basis, to each eligible elder on June 26, 2019. The accumulation limit of vouchers was also

increased to \$8,000 on the same day. In general, at the end of 2019, the maximum amount of vouchers that elders could accumulate in their account was \$6,000. Hence, basically no elders had voucher amounts forfeited on January 1, 2020 due to the voucher amount in their voucher accounts exceeding the accumulation limit of \$8,000.

(3) To facilitate the use of vouchers by elders, the Government has implemented a number of enhancements to the Scheme in recent years, including progressively increasing the annual voucher amount from the initial \$250 to the current \$2,000, changing the face value of each voucher from \$50 to \$1 in 2014 to make it more flexible for use, as well as lowering the eligibility age from 70 to 65 in 2017. The Government also provided an additional one-off \$1,000 voucher amount to each eligible elder in 2018 and 2019 as a Budget measure. The accumulation limit of vouchers was increased to \$8,000 in June 2019 to facilitate elders to plan for the use of their vouchers. Furthermore, the Government regularised the Pilot Scheme at the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH) in June 2019 to provide greater certainty for Hong Kong elders to continue to use vouchers at HKU-SZH. To complement the commencement of operation of the Kwai Tsing District Health Centre (DHC) in September 2019, the Government also allows the use of vouchers to pay for the services at DHCs, in order to increase the options of primary healthcare services available to elders under the Scheme.

Currently, there is no restriction on the number of years that an elder may carry forward unspent vouchers, but the unspent amount cannot exceed the accumulation limit of \$8,000. To help elders better manage their voucher balances and plan ahead, the Department of Health (DH) has enhanced the function for checking voucher balances on the Scheme's website and voucher balance enquiry hotline in June 2019, allowing elders to check the amount of vouchers that will be disbursed to their accounts and the amount of vouchers expected to be forfeited due to the accumulation limit being exceeded on January 1 of the coming year. Elders can also check their voucher balance and their transaction history in the past two years via the Electronic Health Record Sharing System mobile app, which is planned to be launched in the first quarter of this year.

The review on the Scheme completed by the DH in 2019 concluded that with respect to strengthening primary healthcare, the Scheme still had room to improve in some areas, including not yet being able to more effectively facilitate healthcare service providers to provide and elders to use services which are in line with the Primary Healthcare Reference Framework, and enhance elders' awareness of prevention of various diseases and promote healthy living, etc. When considering whether to increase the accumulation limit of vouchers, the Government has to balance various factors, including the need to encourage elders to make use of services that best suit their health needs rather than saving up the vouchers excessively, whether the plan has provided sufficient flexibility for elders to spend the vouchers, as well as the impact on budgeting and planning from the perspective of public finances etc. The Government has no plan to further increase the accumulation limit of voucher at this stage. We will continue to keep in view the operation of the Scheme and make appropriate adjustments and take suitable

measures as necessary, in order to ensure that the Scheme continues to align with the Government's policy objectives.

Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital announces passing away of COVID-19 patient

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH) today (January 13) announced that a patient confirmed with COVID-19 passed away.

An 81-year-old male patient with chronic disease (case number: 6921) consulted a general practitioner for a cough, and subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. He was then admitted to an isolation ward of PYNEH on December 6 last year. His condition continued to deteriorate and he eventually succumbed at 11.32am today.

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

Including the above patient, 157 COVID-19 confirmed patients have passed away in public hospitals so far.

LCQ16: District Cooling Systems

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (January 13):

Question:

Hong Kong's first district cooling system (DCS) is located in Kai Tak (KTDCS), which has been put into operation since 2013, providing services to the public and private non-domestic developments in the Kai Tak Development Area. Given that there was an overrun in the cost of the construction works of KTDCS by two times (increasing substantially from \$1.67 billion to \$4.95

billion) and it takes decades to recover the cost, some members of the public have questioned the cost effectiveness of adopting such systems locally. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the maintenance and other operating expenses of KTDCS in the last financial year;

(2) of the energy efficiency of KTDCS at present; the reduction in carbon emissions and the savings in electricity cost due to the adoption of the system since its commissioning;

(3) how the (i) capital and (ii) recurrent expenditures per megawatt of the cooling capacity of KTDCS compares with those of the individual water-cooled air-conditioning systems using cooling towers;

(4) given that some members of the public have criticised DCSs for their high construction costs, long cost recovery periods and high maintenance costs, whether the Government has reviewed the cost effectiveness of KTDCS; if so, of the details;

(5) of the estimated expenditures and cost recovery periods of those DCSs which the Government intends to build in new development areas (such as the Lok Ma Chau Loop) (set out such information by district); whether it will take enhancement measures for the new DCSs; if so, of the details; and

(6) given that a water main in a chiller plant room of KTDCS burst in July 2018, causing flooding in the room, of the number of similar incidents that have occurred since the commissioning of the system; the measures in place to prevent the occurrence of similar incidents?

Reply:

President,

The District Cooling System (DCS) in the Kai Tak Development (Kai Tak DCS) is the first of its kind in Hong Kong. In this regard, the Government decided to submit funding applications to the Finance Committee (FC) by phases for taking forward the works, having regard to the progress of the Kai Tak Development including the construction and operation programmes of the relevant buildings. The total funding approved for all phases of the Kai Tak DCS was \$4,945.5 million, which was the same as the estimate reported when the funding application for Phase IIIA of the Kai Tak DCS was submitted to the FC in 2013.

The Government's reply to various parts of the Hon Chan's question is as follows:

(1) The Kai Tak DCS is still at its initial stage of operation. Only 11 buildings requiring central air-conditioning in the Kai Tak Development have been completed and are using DCS at the moment. Their cooling demand is only a fraction of the maximum design cooling capacity. Since the Kai Tak DCS is

still not in full operation at this stage, operating data for the entire system is not yet available. Besides, we are seeking funding approval by the FC for the DCS projects in the Tung Chung New Town Extension (East) and Kwu Tung North New Development Area, and the relevant tenders will be invited in parallel. As the operating data may affect the tender exercises, it is not appropriate to disclose such information at this stage.

(2) In general, DCS saves a maximum of 35 per cent electricity consumption as compared with conventional central air-conditioning systems separately installed in individual buildings, thus reducing carbon emissions. It is therefore an environmental infrastructure to combat climate change and save energy. The total estimated electricity saving from the commencement of operation of the Kai Tak DCS in 2013 to 2019-20 is about 20.3 million kWh (the total estimated electricity cost saving is about \$24 million), which is equivalent to a reduction in carbon emissions of 14 210 tonnes.

(3) and (4) In general, DCS saves a maximum of 20 per cent electricity consumption in comparison with individual water-cooled air-conditioning systems using cooling towers (WACS). Besides, since it is not necessary to install chiller plants at user buildings, the upfront capital cost can be reduced by about 5 per cent to 10 per cent of the total building costs. Overall speaking, DCS is more cost-effective than WACS. The Government has committed to setting the tariff of DCS at a competitive level, comparable to the cost of using WACS, with a view to recovering the capital and operating costs of DCS through charges collected from its users over the system life of 30 years. We conducted a review on the tariff level of the Kai Tak DCS in 2020, and the findings indicated that the prevailing tariff could be kept unchanged while the target payback period of 30 years could still be achieved.

(5) The Environment Bureau and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) are working on the implementation of DCS in the Tung Chung New Town Extension (East) and Kwu Tung North New Development Area, at an estimated cost of \$3,918.2 million and \$5,787.7 million in money-of-the-day prices respectively. The charging arrangement of the two new DCS projects will be similar to that of the Kai Tak DCS, which aims to collect charges from users to recover both the capital and operating costs over the system life of 30 years.

Regarding the enhancement measures, apart from being an energy-efficient air-conditioning system, the design of the two new DCS projects includes various forms of energy efficiency features and renewable energy technologies, including light-emitting diode lighting and photovoltaic systems. As regards greening features, there will be landscaping, roof greening and vertical greening in appropriate areas for environmental and amenity benefits.

(6) Since the commencement of operation of the Kai Tak DCS in 2013, there has only been one incident of water pipe burst that occurred in 2018. This was an isolated incident. The overall system operation including the district cooling services was not affected. After the incident, the EMSD requested the

contractor to improve the management of the plant and to ensure proper inspection and maintenance of pipework. With reference to the experience of the Kai Tak DCS, the design of the new DCS projects has been enhanced. Flooding gates and sump pumps will be added to the DCS plants so that any water pipe burst can be handled within the shortest time. Each DCS plant will also be separated into several zones to prevent interruption to the operation of the whole plant in case of water pipe burst in a certain zone.

LCQ5: Anti-epidemic efforts targeted at foreign domestic helpers

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 13):

Question:

It has been reported that so far, a number of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) have been infected with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Among such FDHs, some were suspected of having transmitted the disease to their employers after getting infected in FDH dormitories. Moreover, during holidays, a large number of FDHs gather and share meals in public places such as parks, allegedly violating the stipulations which prohibit group gatherings and require the wearing of a mask in public places, but very few FDHs have been prosecuted as a result. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the current number of FDH dormitories and the number of boarding places therein; whether it will enact legislation to regulate the sanitary conditions of FDH dormitories; if so, of the details and the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that, and what measures are in place to prevent such dormitories from becoming venues for spreading the epidemic;

(2) of the up-to-date number of FDHs who were confirmed to have contracted COVID-19; what measures are in place to step up law enforcement efforts against violation of anti-epidemic stipulations by FDHs; and

(3) given that quite a number of FDHs have disregarded the appeal for refraining from gathering on holidays, whether the Government will examine prohibiting FDHs from gathering in public places; if so, of the details and the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that, and the alternative solutions?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureaux and departments, my consolidated response to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) Under existing laws, there is no regulation in relation to the definition or management of "foreign domestic helper (FDH) boarding facility", and the Government also does not maintain information on the number of and other information on "FDH boarding facilities".

In general, employers must provide FDHs with free accommodation and with reasonable privacy in accordance with the Standard Employment Contract. Having said that, we understand that FDHs may need to arrange temporary accommodation for themselves in certain circumstances, such as when they are waiting to leave Hong Kong after their contract is prematurely terminated. Under existing laws, there is no mandatory requirement for employment agencies (EAs) to provide boarding facilities for job-seekers (including FDHs). Pursuant to the Code of Practice for EAs, should an EA conduct any activities (e.g. holding training classes, providing activity venues or temporary boarding facilities, etc.) or conducting other non-EA related business at an EA's licensed address or other premises, the EA must understand and comply with the requirements in the relevant laws. The Government currently has no plan to enact a new legislation to specially regulate "FDH boarding facilities", activity venues of FDHs or the hygiene conditions of such facilities.

Given that some FDHs who had stayed in boarding facilities were confirmed to be COVID-19 positive, the Labour Department (LD) approached EA associations multiple times to remind the industry to avoid arranging FDHs to stay in a crowded environment and remind FDHs to comply with personal and environmental hygiene and social distancing guidelines issued by the Centre for Health Protection, including performing hand hygiene frequently, regularly cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, maintaining an appropriate social distance with other people, etc. In addition, the LD also reminded EAs not to arrange FDHs to gather in boarding facilities and to register the record of FDHs who are staying at or have visited the boarding facilities to facilitate tracing of possible infection cases.

Furthermore, in August 2020, the LD arranged a free one-off COVID-19 testing service for all FDHs who were staying in boarding facilities of EAs. In response to confirmed infection cases of FDHs who had stayed in boarding facilities which were not operated by EAs, the Government later expanded the scope of the testing service to cover FDHs whose previous employment contracts have expired or have been terminated and who are waiting to join the new employers' family. This group of FDHs are most likely to be staying in boarding facilities while waiting to change employers. The LD provided a total of three rounds of free testing service to such FDHs from August to December 2020. In total, more than 9 000 FDHs benefited from the aforementioned testing services. The LD will continue to provide free testing service from January to February 2021 for FDHs waiting to join their new

employers' family.

(2) and (3) As of January 3, 2021, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Hong Kong was 8 965, including 7 097 locally acquired cases and 1 868 imported cases. Of these, 465 cases involved FDHs who newly arrived in Hong Kong or are already in Hong Kong, including 212 locally acquired cases and 253 imported cases.

According to the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation, starting from December 11, 2020, persons who participate in a prohibited group gathering of more than two persons in public places or who do not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement may be charged a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, the LD has repeatedly, through channels such as press releases, the FDH Portal, FDH groups, employer groups and the Consulates-General of FDH-sending countries in Hong Kong, encouraged FDHs to stay home for rest on their rest day as far as possible and avoid gathering when going out to safeguard their personal health; and appealed to employers and FDHs to have candid discussions on rest day arrangements as well as recommending employers to arrange their FDHs to take rest days on a weekday instead of during the weekend as far as possible, so as to minimise the health risk of participating in social activities. I have also conveyed the same messages through the social media platform.

In addition, the LD has all along been conducting mobile broadcasts in Chinese, English and major FDH languages in popular gathering places of FDHs and distributing promotional leaflets to FDHs on Saturdays and Sundays to call upon them to comply with the regulations on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places. During holidays when there would be a relatively large number of FDHs gathering, LD would collaborate with the relevant departments such as the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to conduct joint operations against behaviour in contravention of social distancing measures. Taking the two long holidays in the period from December 24, 2020 to January 3, 2021 as an example, the LD, the FEHD, the Police and the LCSD conducted joint operations at Tamar Park in Admiralty, Victoria Park in Causeway Bay, the footbridge near Fa Yuen Street in Mong Kok, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui, etc. to urge FDHs to comply with the regulations on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places, maintain environmental hygiene, refrain from conducting unlicensed hawking activities, etc. For those who refused to abide by the regulations after repeated reminders, the relevant departments had taken appropriate enforcement actions.

From December 11, 2020 to January 3, 2021, the relevant departments issued a total of 60 fixed penalty notices to FDHs in relation to the above regulations. The relevant departments also conducted joint operations last Sunday again, i.e. January 10, 2021. The Government will continue with various promotional activities to call upon FDHs to comply with the

regulations on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places. The relevant departments will also continue to conduct joint operations at appropriate times.

As regards whether to prohibit FDHs from gathering in public places, this suggestion itself is quite controversial, and the legislative amendments or mandatory measures involved may even touch upon discrimination issues. Even if the Government, in order to enhance the effectiveness of anti-epidemic efforts, may need to distinguish certain high-risk groups for implementing special measures in a more focused manner, the process must be founded on objective facts such as the development of the epidemic, infection cases and risk management as well as detailed analysis. On this basis, the Government has no plan to target FDHs only and prohibit FDHs from gathering in public places.