

A dry December

The weather for December 2020 was cloudier than usual in Hong Kong. The mean amount of cloud in the month was 62 per cent, 10 per cent above the normal figure of 52 per cent. The monthly mean temperature of 18.1 degrees was 0.2 degrees above the normal figure of 17.9 degrees. The month was also much drier than usual with a total rainfall of only 1.5 millimetres, about 6 per cent of the normal figure of 26.8mm. The annual total rainfall in 2020 was 2395.0mm, similar to the annual normal figure of 2398.5mm.

Dominated by a dry winter monsoon, the weather of Hong Kong was generally fine and dry on the first eight days of the month with rather cool mornings on December 4 and 5. With a broad band of clouds covering the coast of Guangdong and the moderation of the winter monsoon, the weather became milder and mainly cloudy with a few light rain patches from December 9 to 13.

Under the influence of an intense winter monsoon, local weather became appreciably cooler from December 14 to 17. There were also a few light rain patches from December 14 to 15. With the replenishment of a dry winter monsoon, local weather became mainly fine and dry from December 18 to 21. It was also cold on the mornings of December 19 and 20. Affected by a cloud band over the coast of Guangdong, the weather became cloudier in the next two days with a few rain patches on December 23.

With clouds thinning out, the weather of Hong Kong turned mainly fine and dry during the day on December 24. Visibility was rather low in some areas in that afternoon. Affected by an easterly airstream, local weather became cloudier with a few light rain patches and mist at the beginning on the Christmas Day. Under the influence of a relatively dry easterly airstream, it was generally fine, mild and dry during the day from December 26 to 29. With plenty of sunshine, the temperature at the Hong Kong Observatory soared to 24.5 degrees on the afternoons of December 27 and 29, the highest of the month.

Meanwhile, a cold front moved across southern China on the night of December 29. Under the influence of the associated intense cold surge, the weather of Hong Kong became windy and significantly colder on December 30. It was cold, windy and very dry on the New Year's Eve with the temperature at the Hong Kong Observatory dropping to 8.1 degrees in the morning, the lowest of the month. The temperature at Tai Mo Shan even dropped to minus 1.2 degrees.

One tropical cyclone occurred over the South China Sea and the western North Pacific in December 2020.

Details of issuance and cancellation of various warnings/signals in December are summarised in Table 1. Monthly meteorological figures and departures from normal for December are tabulated in Table 2.

Mobile specimen collection stations and community testing centres provide free testing for persons subject to compulsory testing

With the prolonged local COVID-19 epidemic situation, there has been a widespread number of confirmed cases across all districts. Some of the confirmed cases have been asymptomatic which indicates the existence of many silent transmission chains within the community. The Government has exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to cover a number of buildings across the territory under compulsory testing notices and require residents, workers and visitors to undergo testing. To facilitate persons covered under the compulsory testing notices to undergo testing, the Government has arranged for testing service providers to set up mobile specimen collection stations at a number of locations in various districts to provide free and convenient testing services for them.

The opening dates and operating hours of the mobile specimen collection stations already in operation in various districts providing free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing services for the general public are at the Annex. A new mobile specimen collection station will be set up in Princess Margaret Hospital to provide free testing services for the workers, visitors and patients of the hospital. The Government has taken into account the testing service needs of individual buildings covered under compulsory testing notices and the existing testing services near the buildings in the course of setting up mobile specimen collection stations.

The Government will decide whether it is necessary to increase the number of stations, adjust or extend the operation periods of the stations after reviewing their usage and the public's demand for the testing service.

Apart from mobile specimen collection stations, persons subject to compulsory testing can also choose to attend any of the community testing centres in all districts to receive testing free of charge. Separately, as there have been several COVID-19 confirmed cases in Kat Hing Wai, Kam Tin Heung, Yuen Long recently, the Community Testing Centre in Yuen Long Town East Community Hall extends free testing service to residents of Kat Hing Wai from today (January 5) until January 7 (Thursday) tentatively. The operating hours of the centres are from 8am to 1.30pm and from 2.30pm to 8pm daily. The centres provide booking as well as on-site registration services. Members of the public are only required to input simple personal information, and select the testing centre and time slot in the 24-hour appointment booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk). The centres accord priority to those who make

bookings in advance.

A Government spokesman said, "The testing service providers will provide specimen collection services by combined nasal and throat swabs at the mobile specimen collection stations and community testing centres for testing free of charge. Generally speaking, mobile specimen collection stations only provide testing services for local residents and workers who are subject to compulsory testing."

People whose test results are negative will be informed by SMS notifications through their mobile phones. Persons subject to compulsory testing must properly keep the relevant records. If any specimen tested shows a preliminarily positive result, the specimen 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.

The Government reminds the public that they can undergo COVID-19 testing for free through various means. For details on other free-of-charge testing means other than mobile specimen collection stations and community testing centres, please refer to the following webpage: www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html. If a person has symptoms, he or she should seek medical attention immediately and should not attend the mobile specimen collection stations or community testing centres.

The spokesman urged all individuals who are in doubt about their own health condition, or individuals with exposure to infection risk (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases) to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons.

Funding for Distance Business Programme increased to \$1.9 billion

The Innovation and Technology Commission today (January 5) announced that the funding for the Distance Business Programme under the Anti-epidemic Fund has been increased from \$1.5 billion to \$1.9 billion to provide funding support for eligible applications received.

A spokesman for the Commission said that the Programme had received an overwhelming response from enterprises. During the application period from May 18 to October 31, 2020, the Programme received a total of 38 572 applications, of which nearly 10 000 were submitted in the last week of October. About 95 per cent of the applications received came from small and medium-sized enterprises. As at 10am today, 28 038 applications had been

processed, of which 25 930 were approved. Excluding cases in which the enterprises did not accept the application results or provide relevant documents after their applications had been approved, the total funding involved is around \$1.4 billion with average approved funding of about \$60,000.

"Through increasing the financial commitment of the Programme, the Government hopes to meet the strong demand of applicant enterprises for distance business during the pandemic as far as possible. The Programme Secretariat is working at full steam to process the remaining applications, and aims to notify enterprises of the application results by the end of January," the spokesman said.

The Distance Business Programme aims at supporting enterprises to adopt information technology solutions to continue business and services during the pandemic. Enterprises which have submitted applications may check the statuses of their applications and manage their applications via the online system (u.hkpc.org/dbiz). For other enquiries, please contact the Programme Secretariat, the Hong Kong Productivity Council, by phone on 2788 5070 during business hours (9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except public holidays)) or via email at dbiz@hkpc.org.

Over 2 500 vacancies on offer at Creating New Opportunities Online Job Fair

The Labour Department (LD) will hold the Creating New Opportunities Online Job Fair from January 7 to 6pm on January 8 on the department's Interactive Employment Service website (www.jobs.gov.hk) for job seekers to obtain information on job vacancies and submit online job applications.

A total of 44 organisations, mainly from the business services, property management and retail industries will participate, offering over 2 500 vacancies.

The vacancies offered cover a wide variety of positions, including customer services officer, accounting clerk, administrative assistant, digital marketing officer, pet adoption assistant, pet groomer, course tutor for primary school student, fitness trainer, cooking assistant, technician and engineer.

Around 79 per cent of the vacancies are full-time jobs and most of them offer monthly salaries ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000. Around 98 per cent require a Secondary Six education level or below. Around 75 per cent are open

to job seekers without relevant work experience.

Job seekers need to pre-register as a user of the LD's Interactive Employment Service before submitting online job applications to the participating organisations during the job fair. All services are free of charge. More information can be found on the department's Interactive Employment Service website.

Places of Amusement Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme under fourth-round of Anti-epidemic Fund open for application

A spokesman for the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) said today (January 5) that the Places of Amusement Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme (the Scheme), re-launched under the fourth-round of the Anti-epidemic Fund, is now open for application. The Scheme provides a one-off subsidy of \$100,000 to billiard establishments, public bowling alleys and public skating rinks operating with a licence issued under the Places of Amusement Regulation (Cap. 132BA). It aims to provide subsidies to the eligible licence holders whose businesses have been directly affected by the anti-epidemic and social distancing measures imposed by the Government.

Holders of a valid Places of Amusement Licence issued by the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services under the Places of Amusement Regulation (Cap. 132BA) are eligible for application. Eligible licence holders should submit their applications to the Licensing and Prosecution Unit under the LCSD. The deadline for application is February 4. Upon submission of the completed application form and supporting documents, the disbursement of subsidies could generally be made in batches around two weeks after the deadline of the application.

The application form and guidelines will be sent to each licence holder by mail or can be obtained from the website (www.lcsd.gov.hk). For enquiries, please contact the Licensing and Prosecution Unit at 2601 8799.