

Labour Department public occupational health talks cancelled

To continue to help reduce social contact and the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the community, the Labour Department announced today (April 9) that the following public talks at the respective venues have been cancelled. Enrolled participants will be informed of the cancellations.

April 16: "Prevention of Lower Limb Disorders and Guidance Notes on Standing at Work" (Activity Room 1, G/F, Hong Kong Central Library)

April 20: "Occupational Safety and Health for Confined Space Workers" (Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Space Museum)

April 23: "Health Hazards of Hot Environment at Work" (Activity Room 1, G/F, Hong Kong Central Library)

SED's opening remarks at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee today (April 9):

Chairman,

The total expenditure on education in 2020-21 is \$112.3 billion. Of this, the recurrent education expenditure increases by 7.8 per cent to \$99.6 billion, accounting for over one-fifth of the total government recurrent expenditure and taking up the largest share among all policy areas. The recurrent expenditure on education has, over 10 years (i.e. from 2011-12 to 2020-21 financial year), increased by 79 per cent with an average growth rate of 6.7 per cent per annum. This demonstrates the Government's long-term commitment to invest in education.

The current term Government has devoted substantial resources to education and implemented a series of measures in the past two years. Every aspect of the education sector can benefit from these measures. In 2020-21, we will consolidate the effects of these measures and, at the same time, keep allocating new resources to education as well as for nurturing talents and take forward the following new measures announced in the Policy Address and Budget.

For primary and secondary education, we will enhance the manpower arrangement for vice-principals in public sector schools; improve the demarcation arrangements for headship rankings as well as the manpower at the middle management level in public sector secondary schools; upgrade the Primary School Curriculum Leader post in public sector primary schools of a smaller scale. We will also enhance the staff establishment of the boarding section of aided special schools in order to provide better services for the boarders of these schools. The measures include upgrading the ranks of warden and assistant warden of boarding sections with a capacity of 40 or above, and increasing the number of assistant wardens and houseparents-in-charge; improving the Saturday and Sunday manning ratios; and providing an additional grant to the boarding sections of schools for children with physical disability, moderate intellectual disability (ID), severe ID and visual impairment cum ID to employ personal care workers or hire related services.

Starting from the 2020/21 school year, we will adjust the additional funding model for schools admitting non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students with an annual adjustment mechanism to enhance the support for NCS students in learning Chinese and create an inclusive learning environment in schools. We will provide all public sector primary and secondary schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme primary and secondary schools, and special schools, which admit a relatively small number of NCS students, with enhanced additional funding under a new two-tiered arrangement. In addition, for five years starting from the 2020/21 school year, we will provide specific parent education programmes for parents of NCS students.

Furthermore, we will enhance the support for students with autism spectrum disorders by assisting public sector ordinary schools to deploy a tiered intervention model by phases. We will also regularise the student grant for secondary day-school, primary school and kindergarten students starting from the 2020/21 school year, and pay the examination fees for school candidates sitting for the 2021 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination.

In addition, we plan to launch the "Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme for Self-financing Post-secondary Education" to provide financial support for self-financing institutions in offering designated sub-degree or undergraduate programmes that meet market needs but require high start-up costs. We will also implement in the 2020/21 academic year a pilot scheme for five cohorts to provide fellowships for local students admitted to designated taught postgraduate programmes that meet Hong Kong's development needs.

As regards Vocational and Professional Education, we will implement a pilot programme for three years starting from the 2020/21 academic year to provide subsidies for trainees under the Training and Support Scheme of the Vocational Training Council to take part in study and exchange programmes outside Hong Kong.

Chairman, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer further questions from Members. Thank you.

FEHD urges public to avoid grave-sweeping activities during Easter holidays

With the approach of the Easter holidays, a spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (April 9) appealed to members of the public to avoid grave sweeping during the Easter holidays and defer their grave-sweeping plans as far as possible in light of the current severe epidemic situation. Doing so can lessen crowd conditions and reduce close contact, thereby consolidating the recent progress made in reducing the risk of spreading the virus through social contact.

The FEHD reminded grave sweepers to avoid group gatherings when grave sweeping, maintain an appropriate social distance with others at all times and avoid meal gatherings with relatives and friends at worship sites.

An FEHD spokesman said, "The Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) came into effect on March 29. The regulation prohibits group gatherings with more than four people in public places and grave sweeping is not exempted. Therefore, members of the public have to abide by the group gathering regulation by having not more than four people together during grave sweeping unless they are living in the same household. In addition, a distance of at least 1.5 metres should be maintained between grave sweeper groups."

For members of the public visiting cemeteries and columbaria to pay respects to ancestors, the spokesman reminded that they should seek medical advice promptly and refrain from grave sweeping if they have fever or respiratory symptoms. Grave sweepers should maintain good personal hygiene, wear surgical masks and always keep their hands clean. They are also reminded to keep flammable items (e.g. alcohol antiseptic sprays and alcohol-based hand sanitisers) away from ignition sources, incense and candles, and furnaces for the sake of safety.

The spokesman stressed, "At this critical moment when the epidemic situation remains severe, members of the public should co-operate and work together to fight the virus. They should seriously consider postponing grave-sweeping activities so as to prevent and protect themselves and their family members from infection, thereby preventing the spread of the virus in the community."

The FEHD appeals to members of the public to make use of the Internet Memorial Service webpage (www.memorial.gov.hk) or its mobile application anywhere and anytime to pay tribute to deceased loved ones.

Rates and Government rent due April 29

Demand notes for rates and/or Government rent for the quarter from April to June 2020 have been issued, and payment should be made by April 29, 2020.

The demand notes have reflected the rates concession for this quarter, subject to a ceiling of \$1,500 and \$5,000 for each rateable domestic and non-domestic tenement respectively. Any unused portion of the concession in this quarter will not be used to offset the outstanding rates in any other quarter. The concession does not apply to payment of Government rent.

These demand notes show the rateable values following the 2020-21 General Revaluation. Members of the public wishing to object to the new rateable value may lodge a proposal in the specified form (R20A) with the Commissioner of Rating and Valuation not later than May 31. Objections can also be made by submitting an electronic form (e-R20A) using the "Electronic Submission of Forms" service provided on the department's website (www.rvd.gov.hk). Irrespective of whether an objection has been made, rates and/or Government rent must be paid by the last day for payment.

Payment can be made :

- (1) by using autopay or electronic means (such as PPS, bank automated teller machines, Faster Payment System or Internet);
- (2) by uploading an e-Cheque/e-Cashier's Order via the "Pay e-Cheque" portal www.payecheque.gov.hk;
- (3) by sending a crossed cheque to the Treasury, P0 Box 28000, Gloucester Road Post Office, Hong Kong (please note that mail with underpaid postage will be rejected); or
- (4) in person at any of the post offices or designated convenience stores. For the addresses and opening hours of post offices, please call Hongkong Post's hotline (2921 2222), or visit www.hongkongpost.hk.

If demand notes have not been received, members of the public may call 2152 0111, fax 2152 0113, or visit the Rating and Valuation Department, 15/F, Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices, 303 Cheung Sha Wan Road, Kowloon.

Members of the public can also visit the department's website at www.rvd.gov.hk to obtain replacement demand notes or enquire as to the amount payable. For instant payment, payers may obtain a "payment QR code" from the "Account Enquiries" service at the website by using mobile devices and present it at any post office, 7-Eleven, Circle K or VanGo in Hong Kong.

A surcharge of 5 per cent will be imposed for late payment and a further

surcharge of 10 per cent will be levied on the amount (including the 5 per cent surcharge) that remains unpaid six months after the payment deadline.

To support environmental protection, payers are advised to utilise the department's free eRVD Bill service to receive e-bills and make payments. They are also encouraged to settle bills by Autopay or other means of e-payment (e.g. PPS, ATM, Internet or e-Cheque/e-Cashier Order) in order to save queuing time. Application forms for autopay are obtainable from the Rating and Valuation Department, District Offices and major banks in Hong Kong or by telephoning 2152 0111. Payers may also download the form from the department's website.

Tenders invited for government property tenancy

The Government Property Agency is inviting tenders for a three-year tenancy of the government property situated at Shop No. 17 on Podium Level 2 of Shun Lee Disciplined Services Quarters, 32 Lee On Road, Kwun Tong, Kowloon.

The premises should only be used for (i) retail or provision of services (excluding TV or Internet game centre, off-course betting centre and mahjong school); or (ii) eating outlet; or (iii) the combination of both (i) and (ii).

The tender notice was uploaded today (April 9) to the Agency's website: www.gpa.gov.hk. Tender documents are available for collection at the Government Property Agency, 9/F, South Tower, West Kowloon Government Offices, 11 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, during the period from 9am to 6pm from Mondays to Fridays, except public holidays. The documents can also be downloaded from the Agency's website.

Interested tenderers who wish to attend a site inspection should make a prior appointment with the Government Property Agency by calling 3842 6777 on or before April 22 this year.

Tenderers must submit their tenders by placing them in the Government Logistics Department Tender Box situated on the Ground Floor, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong, before noon on May 5 this year. Late tenders will not be accepted.