

Public and travellers urged to guard against infectious diseases during Lunar New Year holiday

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (January 25) reminded the public of the high level of activity of seasonal influenza (SI) locally and in neighbouring areas. Travellers should practise strict hand, personal, food and environmental hygiene to guard against SI and some common and travel-related infectious diseases in the Lunar New Year holiday.

A. Seasonal Influenza

According to the latest surveillance data, the positive percentage of SI viruses among respiratory specimens received by the CHP continued to increase, from 25.29 per cent in the week ending January 12 to 29.69 per cent the following week. The local seasonal influenza activity may continue to rise further and remain elevated in the period ahead.

Globally, influenza activity remained high in the temperate region of the northern hemisphere with predominance of influenza A(H1) virus. The winter influenza season is underway in the United States, Canada, a number of European countries including the United Kingdom, and our neighboring areas including Korea, Japan, Mainland China, Macao and Taiwan.

Of note, the influenza activity in Japan has reached a high level, with the average number of reported influenza-like illness cases per sentinel site increased markedly from 16.30 in the first week of January to 38.54 in the second week.

The CHP strongly urged the public, in particular children, people aged 50 to 64 years, the elderly and those with underlying illnesses who have not yet received influenza vaccination this season are urged to get vaccinated as early as possible to prevent seasonal influenza as it takes about two weeks for antibodies to develop in the body after vaccination. Medical advice should be sought promptly if influenza-like symptoms develop so that appropriate treatment can be initiated as early as possible to prevent potential complications.

B. Travel-related infectious diseases

- Dengue Fever

From January 18 to yesterday (January 24), the CHP recorded one imported dengue fever (DF) case. The patient had been to Indonesia during the incubation period.

As of yesterday, 12 cases had been confirmed this year, all of which were imported cases. The cases were mainly imported from Indonesia (two), Malaysia (two), Maldives (two), the Philippines (two) and Thailand (two).

DF remains endemic in some areas of Asia and beyond. The latest figures for 2019 revealed that 1 679 cases had been recorded in Thailand, 822 cases in Singapore (since December 30, 2018) and 15 in Japan. In the Americas, the latest figures indicated that 1 599 cases were filed in Mexico in 2019.

To prevent mosquito-borne diseases, travellers should wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or exposed parts of the body. Travellers returning from areas affected by DF and Zika virus infection should apply insect repellent for 14 days or at least 21 days respectively upon arrival in Hong Kong.

- Avian Influenza

Human cases of avian influenza continue to be reported in Mainland China. Since August 2018, four human cases of influenza A(H5N6) infection have been reported in Mainland China (two in Guangxi, and one each in Guangdong and Jiangxi). Another four human cases of influenza A(H9N2) infection have been reported in the same period (three in Guangdong and one in Guangxi). Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5) in birds and poultry have also occurred in many countries in the past few months.

“Travellers visiting the Mainland or other affected areas must avoid poultry contact and visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms. The public should stay alert to possible backyard poultry when visiting relatives and friends, avoid purchasing live or freshly slaughtered poultry, and avoid touching poultry or birds or their droppings. They should strictly observe personal and hand hygiene when visiting any place with live poultry,” the spokesman advised.

Whether locally or outside Hong Kong, people handling chilled poultry or poultry carcasses are reminded to observe strict personal and hand hygiene. Members of the public should never touch their mouth, nose or eyes when handling any poultry, poultry products or eggs. Afterwards, they must wash their hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water.

- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

Regarding Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), as countries in the Middle East, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), continue to report cases from time to time, travellers should avoid going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry.

According to the latest information, 2 279 cases have been reported to

the World Health Organization (with 806 deaths), including 2 060 in 10 Middle East countries comprising 1 901 in the KSA, 87 in the United Arab Emirates, 28 in Jordan, 19 in Qatar, 11 in Oman, six in Iran, four in Kuwait, two in Lebanon, and one each in Yemen and Bahrain.

“The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS Coronavirus,” the spokesman said.

- Measles and rubella

Hong Kong achieved measles elimination in 2016 and the annual reported number of measles cases has remained at a very low level in the past few years. However, measles remains endemic in many places around the world and the incidence levels in these places are much higher than that of Hong Kong.

For rubella, the outbreak of rubella in Japan that started in September 2018 is still ongoing. Although the weekly number of cases has been on a decreasing trend in the past three months, the incidence has not yet returned to the pre-outbreak level.

“Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles and rubella. Members of the public who are planning to travel to places with high incidence or outbreaks of measles or rubella should review their vaccination history and past medical history, especially people born outside Hong Kong who might not have received measles or rubella vaccination during childhood,” the spokesman said.

“Those with incomplete vaccination, unknown vaccination history or unknown immunity against measles or rubella are urged to consult their doctor for advice on vaccination at least two weeks before departure,” the spokesman added.

Pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy who are not immune to measles or rubella as well as children aged under 1 year who are not due for the first dose of the measles, mumps and rubella combined vaccine under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme are advised not to travel to places with outbreaks of measles or rubella.

C. Food poisoning

“In the festive season, food and environmental hygiene are the keys to preventing food poisoning. While some may cook for the Family Reunion Dinner and the New Year Feast, some may choose poon Choi takeaway as an alternative. When collecting and transporting poon Choi, make sure it is kept at above 60 degrees Celsius. Before consuming poon Choi, it should be reheated thoroughly till the core temperature reaches at least 75 degrees Celsius,” the spokesman said. More information on the [healthy tips for enjoying poon Choi](#) can be found on the CHP website.

When consuming party food or hot pot in gatherings, the public should consume thoroughly washed and cooked food. For shellfish, the shells should be well scrubbed and the internal organs removed before consumption. Never use raw eggs as a dipping sauce. Use different chopsticks to handle raw and cooked food to avoid cross-contamination. For more food safety tips, please visit the [webpage of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department's Centre for Food Safety](#).

The public may also visit the CHP's pages on [seasonal influenza](#), [dengue fever](#), [avian influenza](#), [MERS](#), [measles](#), [rubella](#), [Zika virus infection](#) and [food poisoning](#) for more information.

[Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected illicit cigarettes \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs seized about 1.8 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$4.8 million and a duty potential of about \$3.4 million at Lok Ma Chau Control Point on January 23.

Customs officers intercepted an incoming truck declared as carrying mobile toilets at Lok Ma Chau Control Point on January 23. After inspection, Customs officers found the batch of suspected illicit cigarettes inside seven mobile toilets.

The 54-year-old male driver was arrested and the truck was detained. Investigation is ongoing.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



February 2019 adjustment in ceiling prices for dedicated LPG filling stations

The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department today (January 25) announced an adjustment to the auto-LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) ceiling prices for dedicated LPG filling stations from February 1 to February 28, 2019, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contracts of the dedicated LPG filling stations.

A department spokesman said that the adjustment on February 1, 2019, reflects the movement of the LPG international price in January 2019 and the movement in the Composite Consumer Price Index in 2018. The overall adjusted auto-LPG ceiling prices for dedicated LPG filling stations will range from \$2.91 to \$3.45 per litre, representing increases of \$0.02 to \$0.03 per litre.

The spokesman said that the auto-LPG ceiling prices were adjusted according to a specified pricing formula. The formula comprises two elements – the LPG international price and the LPG operating price. The LPG international price is the LPG international price of the preceding month. The LPG operating price is adjusted on the first day of February every year according to the movement in the Composite Consumer Price Index in the previous year. According to the information from the Census and Statistics Department, the year-on-year rate of change in the Composite Consumer Price Index for 2018 was +2.4 per cent. The LPG operating prices of dedicated filling stations also increased according to this rate by around \$0.03 to \$0.04 per litre.

The auto-LPG ceiling prices for respective dedicated LPG filling stations in February 2019 are as follows:

Location of dedicated LPG filling station	Auto-LPG ceiling price in February 2019 (\$/litre)	Auto-LPG ceiling price in January 2019
Fung Yip Street, Chai Wan	3.45	3.42
Ngo Cheung Road, West Kowloon	3.45	3.42
Sham Mong Road, Mei Foo	3.12	3.10
Yip Wong Road, Tuen Mun	3.12	3.10
Marsh Road, Wan Chai	3.11	3.09
Fung Mat Road, Sheung Wan	3.04	3.02
Wai Lok Street, Kwun Tong	3.04	3.02

Yuen Chau Tsai, Tai Po	3.04	3.02
Cheung Yip Street, Kowloon Bay	3.09	3.07
Kwai On Road, Kwai Chung	3.09	3.07
Hang Yiu Street, Ma On Shan	2.91	2.89
Tak Yip Street, Yuen Long	2.91	2.89

The spokesman said that the details of the LPG international price and the auto-LPG ceiling price of each dedicated LPG filling station have been uploaded to the department website www.emsd.gov.hk. They are also posted at dedicated LPG filling stations to enable the trades to monitor the price adjustment.

Details of the pricing adjustment mechanism for dedicated LPG filling stations can also be viewed under the "What's New" section of the department website at www.emsd.gov.hk/en/what_s_new/current/index.html.

[Free concerts to feature Chaozhou and Cantonese music](#)

As part of its Guangdong Music Series, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department will present two free concerts featuring Chaozhou and Cantonese music at the Six Arts Terrace of Kowloon Walled City Park in March.

The first concert, "Music Under the Tree: Chaozhou Music", will be performed by the Hong Kong Chiuchow Music Ensemble led by Lau Fok-kwong, and will be held at 2.30pm on March 9 (Saturday). The programme will include Chaozhou gongs and drums da luogu and xiao luogu music, xianshi ensemble music and Chaozhou operatic singing, including "Universal Celebration", "Lions Playing with a Ball", "As the Waves Wash the Sand", "Liu-Yao-Jin: The Swaying Willow's Golden Sound" and "Su Liuniang" (excerpt) and more.

The second concert, "Music Under the Tree: Cantonese Music", will be held at 2.30pm on March 10 (Sunday), with various local Cantonese music performers taking part including Tong Siu-yin, Tang Siu-wai, To Wing, Pak Tak-wan, Chan Pik-sum, Chan Sing-cheong, Leung Wing-yin, Kwok Ka-ying, Yanki Ma, Jason Lau, Sit Fung-kwan, Yu Wing-ka, Wong Chung-yin, Jessica Fung, Chung Siu-sun, Pang Hong-tai, Wan Kai-ho, Chiu Hing-wan, Szeto Siu, Thomson Chan, Lo Ting-fung, Adward Lam and Tony Lo. The programme will include "Rain Lashing on the Plantain", "Autumn Moon over a Placid Lake", "Meditations in the Boudoir", "Birds Returning to the Woods", "A Hungry Horse Shaking Its Bells", "Thunder in a Drought", "The Toll of the Temple Bell" and more.

Admission is free. Members of the public are invited to enjoy the original essence of traditional Cantonese music under the trees at Kowloon Walled City Park.

For programme enquiries, please call 2268 7321 or visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/music/programs_722.html.

IMF commends Hong Kong's strong buffers and prudent policy frameworks for ensuring continued stability

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released a Staff Report today (January 25) which, substantiated by more detailed analysis, reinforces the conclusions of its assessment of Hong Kong's economic and financial positions published on December 12, 2018.

The IMF notes that Hong Kong's economy benefited from a strong cyclical upswing in 2017 and the momentum continued through the first half of 2018. Despite increasing near-term risks owing to trade tensions and tighter global financial conditions, many years of prudent macroeconomic policies have endowed Hong Kong with ample buffers for smoothening the transition and ensuring continued stability. The IMF commends Hong Kong in particular for maintaining robust financial regulation and supervision and reaffirms its long-standing support for the Linked Exchange Rate System (LERS), noting that it should remain as an anchor of economic and financial stability for Hong Kong. Noting initial signs of softening in the property market, the IMF considers it appropriate for Hong Kong to maintain its three-pronged approach of increasing housing supply and retaining tight macroprudential measures and demand side measures to safeguard financial stability. The IMF also applauds Hong Kong for its continued efforts to maintain competitiveness and expand its role as a leading financial centre, through various initiatives including the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which could create growth opportunities through further regional economic integration.

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, welcomed the IMF's positive assessment and recognition of Hong Kong's sound policies. "With ample buffers, strong economic fundamentals and a robust regulatory and supervisory framework, Hong Kong is well placed to navigate through the challenges ahead. As an international financial centre and the pivotal gateway to the Mainland of China, we will continue to sharpen our competitive edge and reap the opportunities from further regional economic integration, especially in the context of the Greater Bay Area development," he said.

The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Mr Norman Chan, said, "I welcome the IMF's recognition of our robust regulatory and supervisory framework as well as its continued support for the LERS. I agree

with the IMF's view that the macroprudential measures have helped contain systemic risks and should remain in place until there are more signs that the property cycle has turned. We will also continue to push forward initiatives, as highlighted by the IMF, to develop Hong Kong as an international financial centre, such as development of the bond market, fintech and green finance."

The IMF Mission visited Hong Kong from October 29 to November 9, 2018, to conduct the annual IMF Article IV consultation. The Concluding Statement of the Mission's assessment was published on December 12, 2018. The Staff Report was considered and endorsed by the IMF Executive Board on January 10, 2019.

The IMF's press release on the Staff Report is attached in the Annex. The Staff Report can be accessed from the websites of the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (www.fstb.gov.hk) and the IMF (www.imf.org).