

# Update on cases of Legionnaires' disease

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 17) reported the latest number of cases of Legionnaires' disease (LD), and stressed the importance of using and maintaining properly designed man-made water systems, and that susceptible groups should strictly observe relevant precautions.

From December 9 to 15, one community-acquired LD case was reported. The female patient, aged 81 with underlying illnesses, lives in Block 5, Kwai Shing West Estate, Kwai Chung.

"Epidemiological investigations are ongoing to identify potential sources of infection, high-risk exposure and clusters, if any," a spokesman for the CHP said.

As of December 15, 103 LD cases had been reported in 2018. In 2017 and 2016, there were 72 and 75 cases respectively.

"Men, people aged over 50, smokers, alcoholics and persons with weakened immunity are more susceptible to LD. Some situations may also increase the risk of infection, including poor maintenance of water systems leading to stagnant water; living in areas with old water systems, cooling towers or fountains; using electric water heaters, whirlpools and spas or hot water spring spas; and recent stays in hotels or vessels," the spokesman said.

Legionellae are found in various environmental settings and grow well in warm water (20 to 45 degrees Celsius). They can be found in aqueous environments such as water tanks, hot and cold water systems, cooling towers, whirlpools and spas, water fountains and home apparatus which support breathing. People may get infected when they breathe in contaminated droplets (aerosols) and mist generated by artificial water systems, or when handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes.

Immunocompromised persons should:

- Use sterile or boiled water for drinking, tooth brushing and mouth rinsing;
- Avoid using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices. A shower may also generate small aerosols; and
- If using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices, fill the water tank with only sterile or cooled freshly boiled water, and not water directly from the tap. Also, clean and maintain humidifiers/devices regularly according to manufacturers' instructions. Never leave stagnant water in a humidifier/device. Empty the water tank, wipe all surfaces dry, and change the water daily.

The public should observe the health advice below:

- Observe personal hygiene;
- Do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption;
- Strainers in water taps and shower heads should be inspected, cleaned, descaled and disinfected regularly or at a frequency recommended by the manufacturer;
- If a fresh water plumbing system is properly maintained, it is not necessary to install domestic water filters. Use of water filters is not encouraged as clogging occurs easily, which can promote growth of micro-organisms. In case water filters are used, the pore size should be 0.2 micrometres ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) and the filter needs to be changed periodically according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Drain and clean water tanks of buildings at least quarterly;
- Drain or purge for at least one minute the infrequently used water outlets (e.g. water taps, shower heads and hot water outlets) and stagnant points of the pipework weekly or before use;
- Seek and follow doctors' professional advice regarding the use and maintenance of home respiratory devices and use only sterile water (not distilled or tap water) to clean and fill the reservoir. Clean and maintain the device regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions. After cleaning/disinfection, rinse the device with sterile water, cooled freshly boiled water or water filtered with 0.2  $\mu\text{m}$  filters. Never leave stagnant water in the device. Empty the water tank, keep all surfaces dry, and change the water daily; and
- When handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes:
  1. Wear gloves and a face mask;
  2. Water gardens and compost gently using low pressure;
  3. Open composted potting mixes slowly and make sure the opening is directed away from the face;
  4. Wet the soil to reduce dust when potting plants; and
  5. Avoid working in poorly ventilated places such as enclosed greenhouses.

The public may visit the CHP's [LD page](#), the [Code of Practice for Prevention of LD](#) and the [Housekeeping Guidelines for Cold and Hot Water Systems for Building Management](#) of the Prevention of LD Committee, and the CHP's [risk-based strategy](#) for prevention and control of LD.

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## [Temporary traffic arrangements for](#)

## **tram track renewal works in Central District from this Sunday**

The Transport Department (TD) today (December 17) reminded the public that to facilitate the tram track renewal works at Des Voeux Road Central, parts of the slow lane on Queen Victoria Street near Des Voeux Road Central and parts of the fast lane on Des Voeux Road Central eastbound and westbound near Queen Victoria Street will be temporarily closed during the following periods:

- (1) from about 9am on December 23 to 11.59pm on December 26; and
- (2) from about 9am on December 29 to 11.59pm on January 1, 2019.

Appropriate traffic signs and road markings will be erected on site to guide motorists.

The TD anticipates that the traffic in the vicinity of the above road sections will be relatively busy. Motorists should exercise tolerance and patience in case of traffic congestion. Members of the public are advised to plan their journey in advance and allow sufficient travelling time to cater for unexpected delay, and stay alert to the latest traffic news or the department's website ([www.td.gov.hk](http://www.td.gov.hk)).

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## **2018 Open call for funding applications for investigator-initiated research projects and health promotion projects invited**

The Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF) administered by the Food and Health Bureau today (December 17) invited applications for investigator-initiated research projects and health promotion projects.

The HMRF aims to build research capacity and to encourage, facilitate and support health and medical research to inform health policies, improve population health, strengthen the health system, enhance healthcare practices, advance standard and quality of care, and promote clinical excellence through the generation and application of evidence-based scientific knowledge derived from local research in health and medicine. It also provides funding support for evidence-based health promotion projects that help people adopt healthier lifestyles by enhancing awareness, changing

adverse health behaviours or creating a conducive environment that supports good health practices.

The HMRF will consider applications in the following broad areas:

1. public health, human health and health services (e.g. primary care, non-communicable diseases, Chinese Medicine, etc.)
2. prevention, treatment and control of infectious diseases, in particular emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases;
3. advanced medical research in specific fields, including paediatrics, neuroscience, clinical genetics and clinical trials; and
4. health promotion that facilitates mobilisation of local resources to promote good health and prevention of illness in the community.

This open call combines investigator-initiated research projects and health promotion projects. Applications from locally-based tertiary institutions, hospitals, medical schools, non-governmental organisations or other appropriate centres, units or services are invited. Collaboration with local or non-local organisations is encouraged. Higher priority for funding will be given to proposals addressing this year's thematic priorities, which are infectious diseases, primary healthcare and non-communicable disease, mental health, cancer and implementation science.

The normal grant ceiling is \$1.5 million per project with a grant duration not exceeding three years. Each principal applicant is allowed to submit one application (either a new or a resubmission of an application). The principal applicant should be based in a Hong Kong organisation throughout the project period and be employed by the administering institution at the time of submitting the application.

Applications will be subject to peer review. The vetting will take into account scientific merit, local relevance and translational potential/value of the proposals, the capacity of the administering institutions, sustainability of health promotion projects, track record of applicants, value for money of the proposals and research ethics, where applicable.

Completed electronic application forms should be submitted via the electronic Grant Management System (eGMS) (<https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk/eGMS>) on or before March 29, 2019 (18:00 Hong Kong time). Briefing-cum-Grant Skills Training Workshops and eGMS training sessions, to be held in January 2019, are now open for registration.

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Details of the thematic priorities, application-related materials and the workshops can be downloaded from <https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk>. Enquiries can be made by e-mail to [rfs@fhb.gov.hk](mailto:rfs@fhb.gov.hk).

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# Illegal worker jailed

An Indian illegal worker holding a recognisance form was jailed by Shatin Magistrates' Courts on December 14.

During operation "Twilight" on November 22, Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided a restaurant in Quarry Bay. A female Indian illegal worker, aged 29, was arrested. When intercepted, she was working as a dish washer. Upon identity checking, she produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits her from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that she was a non-refoulement claimant. An employer suspected of employing the illegal worker was arrested and the investigation is ongoing.

The illegal worker was charged at Shatin Magistrates' Courts on December 14 with taking employment after landing in Hong Kong unlawfully and remaining in Hong Kong without the authority of the Director of Immigration or while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force. She pleaded guilty to the charge and was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment.

The ImmD 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 on 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 threat 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 interference, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

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## **Appointments to Professional Services Advancement Support Scheme Vetting Committee announced**

The Government announced today (December 17) that it has re-appointed Dr Jonathan Choi Koon-shum as Chairman and Mr Lau Ping-cheung as Vice-Chairman of the Vetting Committee of the Professional Services Advancement Support Scheme (PASS).

The Government has also appointed Dr Priscilla Choy Wai-fun, Ms Jody Sin Kar-yu and Professor Martin Wong Chi-sang as new members of the Vetting Committee and re-appointed all 12 incumbent members.

All the above appointments will take effect from January 1, 2019 for a term of two years.

The PASS was set up to provide financial support for non-profit-distributing organisations to carry out industry-led projects aimed at increasing exchanges and co-operation between Hong Kong professionals and their counterparts in external markets; to promote relevant publicity activities; and to enhance the standards and external competitiveness of Hong Kong professional services. The Vetting Committee is tasked to consider the applications received under the PASS, recommend on the level of funding support, and monitor approved projects.

The full membership of the Vetting Committee, with effect from January 1, 2019, is as follows:

Chairman

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Dr Jonathan Choi Koon-shum

Vice-Chairman

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Mr Lau Ping-cheung

Members

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Dr Sunny Chai Ngai-chiu  
Professor Chetwyn Chan Che-hin  
Mr Chan Chi-chiu  
Dr Priscilla Choy Wai-fun  
Mr Dennis Ho Chiu-ping  
Mr Stephen Hung Wan-shun  
Dr Sigmund Leung Sai-man  
Ms Edith Shih  
Ms Jody Sin Kar-yu  
Mr Peter Sun Kwok-wah  
Professor Tam Kar-yan  
Professor Martin Wong Chi-sang  
Executive Director of Hong Kong Productivity Council or his/her  
representative  
Executive Director of Hong Kong Trade Development Council or his/her  
representative  
Deputy Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development (Commerce and  
Industry)