

# Make prior work arrangements for rainstorms

The Labour Department (LD) today (August 22) reminded employers to make prior work arrangements for staff in times of rainstorms as soon as possible.

"To avoid disputes and confusion, employers should make prior work arrangements for staff and contingency measures in times of rainstorms," an LD spokesman said.

"In working out and enforcing the arrangements, employers should give prime consideration to employees' safety both in the workplace and during their journeys to and from work, and adopt a flexible approach. Whenever possible, they should consult their staff."

The work arrangements should cover the following matters:

- \* Whether employees are required to report for duty when different rainstorm warnings are issued;
- \* After a rainstorm warning is cancelled, the time for staff who have not reported for duty to resume work and the arrangements;
- \* How wages and allowances (if any) will be calculated for staff who are required to report for duty and those who are late for work or absent from work during rainstorms; and
- \* For employees who are required to travel to and from workplaces during rainstorms, whether transport facilities will be provided to them and, if so, the arrangements.

"Employers should make realistic assessments of the requirements for essential staff and require only absolutely essential staff to report for duty in adverse weather conditions. If an Amber, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is issued during working hours, employees working indoors should remain on duty as usual and stay where they are unless it is dangerous to do so. Supervisors of employees working outdoors in exposed areas should suspend outdoor duties as soon as practicable. They should arrange for their employees to take shelter temporarily and resume duty when weather conditions permit. When the Black Rainstorm Warning is issued, those employees should not resume duty until the warning is lowered and weather conditions permit. If the Black Rainstorm Warning remains in force at the end of working hours, for safety reasons, employers should provide employees with an area in the workplace as temporary shelter for them to stay if they want to.

"If possible, employers should provide transport services for employees who are still required to travel to and from workplaces when the Black Rainstorm Warning is in force, or give them a special travelling allowance as encouragement.

"For staff who have practical difficulties in resuming work promptly

upon cancellation of a rainstorm warning, employers should give due consideration to the circumstances of individual employees and handle each case flexibly.

"As rainstorms are natural occurrences that cannot be avoided, employers should not deduct wages of employees who are absent from or late for work because of inclement weather. Neither should employers dismiss an employee summarily based on these grounds," he said.

The spokesman also reminded employers to observe the statutory liabilities and requirements under the Employment Ordinance, the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, the Employees' Compensation Ordinance and the Minimum Wage Ordinance.

Employers should not deduct the annual leave, statutory holidays or rest days employees are entitled to under the Employment Ordinance so as to compensate for the loss of working hours resulting from employees' failure to report for duty upon the announcement of a Black Rainstorm Warning. An employer who without reasonable excuse fails to comply with relevant provisions under the Employment Ordinance is liable to prosecution.

Employers should also note that they have an obligation to maintain a safe workplace for their employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance.

"If employees are required to work in times of rainstorms, employers should ensure that the risks at work are properly controlled and reduced to levels that are as low as reasonably practicable," the spokesman said.

Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, employers are liable to pay compensation for deaths or injuries incurred when employees are travelling by a direct route from their residences to workplaces, or from workplaces back to residences after work, four hours before or after working hours on a day when Typhoon Signal No. 8 or above or a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is in force.

To provide practical guidelines and samples of work arrangements for the reference of employers and employees, the LD has issued the booklet "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms". The code can be obtained from the branch offices of the Labour Relations Division or downloaded from the department's webpage ([www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/Rainstorm.pdf](http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/Rainstorm.pdf)).

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**[CHP urges vigilance against](#)**

# communicable diseases in new school year

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (August 22) urged schools, parents and students to heighten vigilance and adopt strict personal and environmental hygiene as well as mosquito control actions and personal protective measures to prevent the spread of dengue fever (DF) and other communicable diseases in schools as social contact among students in schools will increase when school resumes after the summer holidays.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Hong Kong has experienced an unprecedented outbreak of DF since August 14. As the situation is still evolving, it is likely further cases may occur in the community. The CHP calls for assistance from schools in the prevention of DF."

"As schools are collective assembly places, infectious diseases could be easily spread among people through their daily contacts. Based on seasonal patterns and past surveillance data, we expect that sporadic institutional outbreaks of respiratory illnesses or hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) or chickenpox may occur in the new school year when students and staff gather on campus," the spokesman continued.

"The CHP has issued [letters](#) to schools, kindergartens and child care centres today to remind them for continued vigilance and reinforcement of preventive measures to guard against possible outbreaks when classes resume," the spokesman added.

## A. Dengue fever

To reduce the risk of DF infections, apart from [general measures](#), the CHP reminded schools, parents, staff and students that they should not visit Lion Rock Park during the closure period in order to prevent contracting DF. Scientific studies have shown that infected persons can transmit the virus to mosquitoes through mosquito bites even if they remain asymptomatic or before their onset of symptoms, leading to further spread of the disease. Hence, people who had visited Lion Rock Park are advised to apply insect repellent for 14 days upon their last visit.

Likewise, staff and students returning from affected areas of DF should apply insect repellent for 14 days upon arrival in Hong Kong. Those with DF symptoms should seek medical advice as early as possible.

Eighteen local cases of DF had been confirmed this year as of yesterday. Excluding the local cases, as of yesterday, 61 imported cases had been recorded in 2018. The cases were mainly imported from Thailand (26), the Philippines (12) and Cambodia (seven).

Prompt, continuous, intensive and effective anti-mosquito operation must

be carried out at this stage to prevent DF from further spread. Schools should take the following preventive measures to prevent accumulation of stagnant water and eliminate mosquito breeding sites:

- Put all used cans and bottles into covered dustbins;
- Change water for plants at least once a week, avoid using saucers underneath flower pots;
- Cover tightly all water containers, wells and water storage tanks;
- Keep all drains free from blockage; and
- Top up all defective ground surfaces to prevent the accumulation of stagnant water.

Staff and students are also advised to protect themselves from mosquito bite by taking the following measures:

- Wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers, and apply effective mosquito repellent containing DEET to exposed parts of the body and clothing;
- Use mosquito screens or bed nets when the room is not air-conditioned; and
- Place anti-mosquito devices near entrances such as windows and doors to prevent mosquitoes from entering indoor.

Furthermore, the school management is advised to appoint designated staff for mosquito prevention and control in the school premises. Details are available from the guidelines published by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department:

[www.fehd.gov.hk/english/pestcontrol/library/pdf\\_pest\\_control/mosquito\\_school.pdf](http://www.fehd.gov.hk/english/pestcontrol/library/pdf_pest_control/mosquito_school.pdf).

## B. Influenza and respiratory illnesses

The surveillance data of the CHP showed that the overall local influenza activity is currently at a low level, but outbreaks of influenza-like illness in schools may increase after the start of the new school year. Although influenza is usually self-limiting, it may cause serious illness even in healthy children.

Parents are advised to consult family doctors for seasonal influenza (SI) vaccination for their children for personal protection before the winter season arrives. Parents are reminded that it takes two weeks for the body to develop a sufficient level of antibodies to protect against influenza virus infection after vaccination.

"If students or staff develop fever, respiratory symptoms, diarrhoea, vomiting or skin rash, schools should strongly advise them not to return to campus and to promptly seek medical advice. Management of schools should

observe precautions on campus, such as avoiding sharing clothing or slippers, to prevent possible transmission of diseases," the spokesman added.

For more information on SI vaccination, parents may call the CHP hotline at 2125 2125 or visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#).

#### C. Hand, foot and mouth disease and enterovirus infection

Although local HFMD activity returned to a baseline level in mid-August after its peak in June, sporadic outbreaks may occur in schools and institutions where HFMD can easily spread among young children with close contact. A smaller peak may also occur from October to December.

In 2018, 33 cases of enterovirus (EV) 71 infection had been recorded as of yesterday, which is fewer than the 44 cases in the same period of 2017; whereas five cases of severe paediatric EV infection (other than EV71 and poliovirus) were recorded in 2018 as of yesterday, which is more than the three cases in the same period of 2017. The five infants this year involved children aged 1 to 2 months and each of them was diagnosed with meningitis.

"EV infection is transmitted by direct contact with nose and throat discharges. Children suffering from EV infection should stay at home and avoid contact with other children until they have recovered," the spokesman reminded.

#### D. Chickenpox

Chickenpox is the most common notifiable infectious disease in Hong Kong and is highly communicable, which can be spread through droplets or air. It can also spread through direct or indirect contact with the discharges from vesicles and mucous membranes of persons with chickenpox or herpes zoster. Children are most affected. Locally, there are two seasonal peaks. The number of chickenpox cases usually starts to rise in October and peaks in December and January, while a smaller peak is also observed in June and July.

A total of 225 institutional chickenpox outbreaks affecting 1 138 persons had been recorded in 2018 as of August 17, including 79 outbreaks (363 children) in kindergartens or child care centres and 117 (673 pupils) in primary schools. On the whole, 4 124 chickenpox cases had been reported this year, which is fewer than the 6 551 cases in the same period last year.

Schools are reminded to follow the [Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases](#) on preventive and control measures as well as management of outbreaks, which should be reported to the CHP for prompt follow-up. Schools may refer to the CHP's pages on [DF](#), [SI](#), [HFMD and EV71 infection](#) and [chickenpox](#) and for more information.

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# Employers, contractors and employees should be aware of electrical safety at work during rainstorm

As the rainstorm warning has been issued by the Hong Kong Observatory, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and contractors that they should adopt necessary work arrangements and take suitable safety measures to protect the safety of their employees when they are carrying out electrical work or handling electrical plant.

A spokesman for the LD said today (August 22) that employers and contractors should avoid assigning employees to carry out electrical work (like electric arc welding work) or handle electrical plant at places affected by rainstorms, and should refer to the "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms" and the "Guide on Safety at Work in times of Inclement Weather" issued by the LD.

Even if electrical work is carried out or electrical plant is handled at places not affected by the rainstorm, suitable safety measures must still be adopted to prevent electric shock as the air would be more humid. Such measures include:

- (i) Ensure that all live parts of an electrical installation are isolated from the power supply source and rendered dead, and the isolation from the power supply source must be maintained as long as electrical work is being carried out;
- (ii) Before carrying out any electrical work or handling any electrical plant, cut off and lock out the power supply source, then test the circuit concerned to confirm it is dead and display suitable warning notices, and issue a work permit thereafter;
- (iii) Ensure that protective devices (such as suitable and adequate fuses and circuit breakers) for the electrical installations or electrical plant have been installed and maintained in good working order, and portable electric tools must be double-insulated or properly earthed;
- (iv) Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as insulating gloves and insulating mats for employees; and
- (v) If live electrical work is unavoidable, a comprehensive risk assessment should be conducted by a competent person and the appropriate safety precautions should be taken to remove or properly control the electrical hazards involved before such work can proceed.

In addition, employees should co-operate with the employer or contractor to follow the safety instructions and use the safety equipment provided.

The LD has published guidebooks and leaflets on electrical work safety.

These safety publications are available free from divisional offices of the department or can be downloaded from its website ([www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2\\_8.htm](http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_8.htm)).

Should there be any questions about occupational safety and health matters, please contact the Occupational Safety Officer of the LD at 2559 2297.

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## **Public urged to report flooding**

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

Members of the public are advised to report any street flooding that comes to their notice to the Drainage Services Department by calling the 24-hour drainage hotline on 2300 1110.

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## **SLW visits Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong (with photos)**

The Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, visited the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong (SBHK) this afternoon (August 22) to get an update on its services provided to persons with emotional stress or suicidal risk.

Accompanied by the Chairman of the SBHK, Mr Robert Wong, Dr Law toured its Suicide Crisis Intervention Centre in Shek Kip Mei. The centre provides outreach service, crisis intervention and intensive counselling to persons with emotional stress and suicidal risk. It also offers support to their carers as well as friends or relatives of people who committed suicide. Apart from carrying out suicide prevention efforts via online chat room, websites and social media, the SBHK launched a mobile application on suicide prevention and emotional support to identify early and proactively reach out to students and youths with suicidal thoughts via an interactive platform.

Dr Law said that the SBHK is committed to promoting cherishing lives and providing valuable services in suicide prevention. The Social Welfare Department has again increased subventions to the SBHK in 2018-19 to address service needs. Noting that the Government will continue to strengthen suicide

prevention through early identification, counselling and support as well as professional training, Dr Law added that discussion of the cross-bureaux/departments task force set up by the Labour and Welfare Bureau on new measures to prevent youth suicide is under way and is expected to complete within 2018. He appealed to members of the public to hold a positive attitude when facing adversity and encouraged them to approach families, friends or professionals for help when in need.

