

# Hong Kong Children's Hospital receives smooth delivery of cord blood haematopoietic stem cell unit from Mainland for patient treatment

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hong Kong Children's Hospital (HKCH) has been treating a 5-year-old girl who suffers from thalassaemia. The clinical team had planned to perform a haematopoietic stem cell transplant for the patient, and during the process, it was noted that her relative has a cord blood unit stored in a cord blood bank in Guangzhou. Putting the patient's treatment as the priority, the clinical team communicated with the cord blood bank concerned, which included understanding the details of the cord blood unit, as well as regulations and procedures for cross-boundary transportation. The clinical team has rendered full facilitation during the process.

Upon notification by HKCH, the Hospital Authority Head Office informed relevant government departments about the transfer and transplant arrangements of this case per the usual mechanism. The Hospital Authority has ensured the transfer and transplant processes comply with related regulations in Hong Kong and the Mainland, and requested that no commercial considerations would be involved.

The cord blood unit concerned arrived as planned today (July 25) at the HKCH stem cell transplant laboratory, where it is now being stored according to established procedures. The clinical team will perform the transplant for the patient at an appropriate time according to the treatment plan and her clinical condition.

HKCH expresses gratitude to all Hong Kong and Mainland units involved in the process for their support and facilitation in bringing hope for the patient's treatment.

HKCH is the only centre in Hong Kong to perform haematopoietic stem cell transplants for children. About 40 to 50 transplants are performed each year, including several thalassaemia cases. Sources of haematopoietic stem cells include bone marrow, peripheral blood stem cells and cord blood. Based on their individual situations, patients can receive an autologous or allogeneic transplant, using haematopoietic stem cells from their siblings, parents or unrelated donors.

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# Labour Department highly concerned about fatal work accident that happened in Kwai Chung today

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about a fatal work accident that happened at a construction site in Kwai Chung this morning (July 25), in which a male worker was trapped between a truck and an excavator. He was certified dead at the scene. The LD is saddened by the death of the worker and expresses its deepest sympathy to his family.

The LD's spokesman said, "We commenced an immediate on-site investigation as soon as we were notified of the accident and issued suspension notices to the contractors concerned, suspending the use of the excavator involved. The contractors cannot resume the use of the excavator until the LD is satisfied that measures to abate the relevant risks have been taken."

The spokesman added, "We will complete the investigation as soon as possible to identify the cause of the accident, ascertain the liability of the duty holders and recommend improvement measures. We will take actions pursuant to the law if there is any violation of the work safety legislation."

To prevent any person from being struck or trapped by a moving or slewing machine, the LD reminds contractors and owners of machines to ensure that a safe distance is maintained between the machines and the persons nearby. Otherwise, all reasonable steps shall be taken to prevent any person from entering the place where the machine is in operation.

The general duty provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance require employers to provide safe working environments, plant and systems of work for their employees. Those who contravene the relevant provisions are liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for two years on conviction on indictment; or \$3 million and imprisonment for six months on summary conviction.

In regard to today's accident, the LD will issue a Work Safety Alert through its mobile application "OSH 2.0", website and email, giving a brief account of the accident concerned to duty holders, workers' unions, professional bodies of safety practitioners and others, and reminding the industry of the importance of following safety precautionary measures to prevent a recurrence of similar accidents.

The LD will also remind the employer concerned of the liability for employees' compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, assist family members of the deceased to claim employees' compensation and closely follow up on the case. For those with financial difficulties, the LD will assist them to apply for appropriate emergency funds. Subject to the needs

and wishes of family members of the deceased, the LD will also liaise with the Social Welfare Department for financial or other assistance.

For the sake of securing the safety and health of employees at work, the LD appeals to employers to provide plant and systems of work that are safe and without risks to health. Employees should co-operate with their employers, adopt all safety measures and use personal protective equipment provided properly to avoid endangering their own work safety and that of other workers.

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## [CHP closely monitors human case of avian influenza A\(H5N6\) on Mainland](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (July 24) closely monitoring a human case of avian influenza A(H5N6) on the Mainland, and again urged the public to maintain strict personal, food and environmental hygiene both locally and during travel.

The case involves a 70-year-old female living in Hefei in Anhui Province, who had visited a live poultry market before the onset of symptoms. She developed symptoms on June 17 and was admitted to a hospital for treatment on June 19. She passed away on July 8.

From 2014 to date, 92 human cases of avian influenza A(H5N6) have been reported by Mainland health authorities.

"All novel influenza A infections, including H5N6, are notifiable infectious diseases in Hong Kong," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Travellers to the Mainland or other affected areas must avoid visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms. They should be alert to the presence of backyard poultry when visiting relatives and friends. They should also avoid purchasing live or freshly slaughtered poultry, and avoid touching poultry/birds or their droppings. They should strictly observe personal and hand hygiene when visiting any place with live poultry.

Travellers returning from affected areas should consult a doctor promptly if symptoms develop, and inform the doctor of their travel history for prompt diagnosis and treatment of potential diseases. It is essential to tell the doctor if they have seen any live poultry during travel, which may imply possible exposure to contaminated environments. This will enable the doctor to assess the possibility of avian influenza and arrange necessary investigations and appropriate treatment in a timely manner.

While local surveillance, prevention and control measures are in place, the CHP will remain vigilant and work closely with the World Health

Organization and relevant health authorities to monitor the latest developments.

The public should maintain strict personal, hand, food and environmental hygiene and pay attention to the following issues to prevent avian influenza:

- Avoid touching poultry, birds, animals or their excrement, or contaminated environment;
- When buying live chickens, do not touch them and their droppings. Do not blow at their bottoms. Wash eggs with detergent if soiled with faecal matter and cook and consume the eggs immediately. Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling chickens and eggs;
- Eggs should be cooked well until the white and yolk become firm. Do not eat raw eggs or dip cooked food into any sauce with raw eggs. Poultry should be cooked thoroughly. If there is pinkish juice running from the cooked poultry or the middle part of its bone is still red, the poultry should be cooked again until fully done;
- Wash hands frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, before handling food or eating, and after going to the toilet, touching public installations or equipment such as escalator handrails, elevator control panels or door knobs, or when hands are dirtied by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing; and
- Wear a mask if fever or respiratory symptoms develop, when going to a hospital or clinic, or while taking care of patients with fever or respiratory symptoms.

â€‹The public may visit the CHP's pages for more information: the [avian influenza](#) page, the weekly [Avian Influenza Report, global statistics and affected areas](#) of avian influenza, the [Facebook Page](#) and the [YouTube Channel](#).

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## **CHP announces end of influenza season**

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (July 25) announced the end of the influenza season which started in mid-January this year. Meanwhile, in view of the increasing local activity of COVID-19, the CHP reminded members of the public to continue to maintain personal, hand and environmental hygiene against respiratory tract infection including COVID-19, and stressed that vaccination can effectively prevent serious cases.

End of influenza season

Influenza activity in Hong Kong had continued to increase since entering the winter influenza season in mid-January 2024. It peaked around late April to late May and then dropped gradually. According to the latest surveillance

data, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses received by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch was 5.16 per cent, and the admission rate with the principal diagnosis of influenza in public hospitals was 0.23 per 10 000 population in the week ending July 20. These data have returned below the baseline level (viz. 9.21 per cent for respiratory specimens testing positive and 0.25 per 10 000 population for admission rate) indicating the end of the influenza season.

In the past four weeks (June 23 to July 20), 42 outbreaks of influenza-like illnesses and 142 cases of severe influenza (including deaths) were reported, which were fewer than 66 outbreaks of influenza-like illnesses and 183 cases of severe influenza (including deaths) reported in the preceding four weeks (May 26 to June 22).

A spokesman for the CHP said, "The current influenza season lasted for 28 weeks, which is not common in Hong Kong. During the season, the predominating virus was influenza A(H3) initially, which later changed to A(H1) from April. Considering the local and overseas experience, the CHP believes that this prolonged influenza season can be attributable to a change of the circulating influenza virus strains."

#### Preparation for 2024/25 seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV)

The SIV programmes in the 2023/24 season reached a record high number of vaccinations. Over 1.87 million doses of vaccines were given under various programmes, representing an increase of around 20 per cent as compared with 2022/23.

The DH is actively preparing the SIV arrangement for 2024/25, which would commence later this year. Among other things, the DH strives to enhance the vaccination rate of school children through the following:

- The DH has met with the Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association, the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations, as well as relevant medical associations respectively to listen to the views of different sectors on the arrangements of the school outreach programmes in the coming year;
- The DH has sent letters to all schools in Hong Kong through the Education Bureau inviting them to participate in the SIV school outreach vaccination programmes, and organised online briefing sessions introducing the arrangements;
- After considering views of different sectors and the feasibility, the choice of vaccine options will be more flexible under the 2024/25 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) Programme. Kindergarten and child care centres can choose to provide both injectable inactivated influenza vaccines and live attenuated influenza vaccines (i.e. nasal vaccines) (LAIIV) at the same or different outreach activities. Moreover, the DH will closely monitor the response of schools (including kindergarten and child care centres, primary and secondary schools) applying for the outreach programmes and provide facilitation in a timely manner;

- Apart from the above-mentioned free-of-charge outreach programme, schools can also invite doctors providing outreach vaccinations under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme from the list published on the CHP's website to arrange outreach service for injectable inactivated influenza vaccines and/or nasal LAIV at their campus under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed).

The DH will announce more details of the vaccination programmes at the appropriate time.

#### COVID-19 situation

Meanwhile, the spokesman also reminded the public that the overall local activity of COVID-19 continues to increase. The CHP will continue to monitor the local COVID-19 situation through various surveillance indicators (including the positive detection rate of respiratory specimens, viral loads from sewage surveillance, numbers of severe and fatal cases, as well as schools/institutions outbreak reports etc). The CHP strongly urges members of the public, particularly children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, to receive vaccinations as early as possible for effective protection against COVID-19.

The spokesman appealed again to symptomatic individuals, even if the symptoms are mild, that they should wear surgical masks and seek medical attention promptly to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to high-risk persons. Personal, hand and environmental hygiene should also be maintained at all times.

For the latest information, please refer to the CHP's [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#), [influenza page](#), [COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website](#) and [Vaccination Schemes page](#).

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## [Hong Kong Customs detects large-scale sea smuggling case and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \\$140 million \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (July 24) detected a large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case in the waters off Lamma Island and seized about 30 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$140 million and a duty potential of about \$100 million, on board a cargo vessel. About 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes seized were duty-not-paid cigarettes known as "cheap whites", accounting for about 30 per cent of the total seizure.

Customs in the early morning of yesterday intercepted a suspicious cargo vessel in the waters off Lamma Island. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized the batch of illicit cigarettes inside three 40-foot containers on board the vessel. Seven non-local men, including a captain and six crew members, aged between 24 and 55, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested.

An investigation is ongoing. Customs will continue to trace the source and the flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

The arrested captain, aged 48, will be charged with one count of importing unmanifested cargoes. He will appear at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (July 26).

Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis for interception at source as well as through its multipronged enforcement strategy targeting storage, distribution and peddling to spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette activities.

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.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

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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](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)) or online form ([eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/](http://eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/)).

