

Update on cases of Legionnaires' disease

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (November 4) reported the latest number of cases of Legionnaires' disease (LD), and stressed the importance of using and maintaining properly designed man-made water systems, adding that susceptible groups should strictly observe relevant precautions.

From October 27 to November 2, the CHP recorded five community-acquired LD cases and one imported LD case:

1. A male patient, aged 72 with underlying illnesses, who had been to the Mainland during the incubation period and was classified as an imported case;
2. A male patient, aged 83 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Yuen Long District;
3. A female patient, aged 73 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Eastern District;
4. A female patient, aged 76 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Kowloon City District;
5. A female patient, aged 74 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Eastern District; and
6. A male patient, aged 66 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Sai Kung District.

"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 November 2, 104 LD cases had been recorded this year. In 2023 and 2022, there were 121 and 80 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; 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 that support breathing. People may become 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; 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 (μm) 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 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 μm 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.

â€‹â€‹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.

Survey on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' Credit Conditions for Third Quarter 2024

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (November 4) the results of Survey on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)' Credit Conditions for the third quarter of 2024. According to the survey, SMEs' credit conditions improved slightly.

Regarding SMEs' perception of banks' credit approval stance relative to 6 months ago, excluding respondents who answered "no idea/don't know", 76 per cent perceived a "similar" or "easier" credit approval stance in the third quarter of 2024, up from 73 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 1 in the Annex). 24 per cent perceived a "more difficult" credit approval stance, down from 27 per cent in the previous quarter. The perception of a more difficult credit approval stance may not necessarily reflect actual difficulties faced by SMEs in obtaining bank credit as the perception could be affected by a number of factors, such as media/news reports, business conditions and opinions of relatives and friends.

Among respondents with existing credit lines, only 1 per cent reported a "tighter" banks' stance, further down from 2 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 2 in the Annex). In this survey, a tighter stance on existing credit lines denotes a range of possible measures or arrangements, such as reducing unused and used credit lines, raising the interest rate, imposing additional collateral requirements, or shortening loan tenor. Therefore, respondents' indication of banks' stance on existing credit lines may not directly reflect banks' supply of credit to SMEs.

The survey also gauged the results of new credit applications from SMEs. 3 per cent of the respondents reported that they had applied for new bank credit during the third quarter of 2024. Among the respondents who had already known their application outcomes, 79 per cent reported fully or partially successful applications, up from 70 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 3 in the Annex).

Owing to small sample sizes of SMEs with existing credit lines (13 per cent of surveyed SMEs) and with new credit applications (3 per cent of surveyed SMEs) during the quarter, the results could be prone to large

fluctuations, and hence should be interpreted with care.

About Survey on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)' Credit Conditions

In light of the importance of SMEs to the Hong Kong economy and concerns about potential funding difficulties facing SMEs over the past few years, the HKMA has appointed the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) to carry out this survey, starting from the third quarter of 2016. This survey is conducted on a quarterly basis, covering about 2 500 SMEs from different economic sectors each time. The results of this survey can help monitor the development of SMEs' access to bank credit from a demand-side perspective.

The results of this survey should be interpreted with caution. Similar to other opinion surveys, views collected in this survey may be affected by changes in sentiment due to idiosyncratic events that occurred over the survey period, which can make the results prone to fluctuations. Readers are advised to interpret the results together with other economic and financial information. In addition, views collected are limited to the expected direction of inter-quarter changes (e.g. "tighter", "no change" or "easier") without providing information about the magnitude of these changes.

Detailed tables and technical information of this survey are published on the website of the HKPC (smecc.hkpc.org).

Interest rate of fifth interest payment for series of retail green bonds due 2025

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority, as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, announced today (November 4) the relevant per annum interest rate for the fifth interest payment of the series of retail green bonds due 2025 (Issue Number: 03GR2505R; Stock Code: 4252) (the Retail Green Bonds) issued under the Government Sustainable Bond Programme (previously known as the Government Green Bond Programme).

According to the Issue Circular dated April 26, 2022 for the Retail Green Bonds, the fifth interest payment of the Retail Green Bonds is scheduled to be made on November 18, 2024, and the relevant interest rate is scheduled to be determined and announced on November 4, 2024 as the higher of the prevailing Floating Rate and Fixed Rate.

On November 4, 2024, the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate are as follows:

Floating Rate: +1.83 per cent (Annex)

Fixed Rate: +2.50 per cent

Based on the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate set out above, the relevant interest rate for the fifth interest payment is determined and announced as 2.50 per cent per annum.

Provisional statistics of restaurant receipts and purchases for third quarter of 2024

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest provisional figures on restaurant receipts and purchases today (November 4).

The value of total receipts of the restaurants sector in the third quarter of 2024, provisionally estimated at \$26.7 billion, decreased by 1.3% over a year earlier. Over the same period, the provisional estimate of the value of total purchases by restaurants decreased by 0.1% to \$8.8 billion.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total restaurant receipts decreased by 3.3% in the third quarter of 2024 compared with a year earlier.

Analysed by type of restaurant and comparing the third quarter of 2024 with the third quarter of 2023, total receipts of Chinese restaurants decreased by 7.7% in value and 9.8% in volume. Total receipts of non-Chinese restaurants decreased by 0.6% in value and 1.5% in volume. Total receipts of fast food shops increased by 8.5% in value and 5.7% in volume. Total receipts of bars decreased by 6.3% in value and 10.1% in volume. As for miscellaneous eating and drinking places, total receipts increased by 0.3% in value, but decreased by 2.8% in volume.

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of total restaurant receipts increased by 2.0% in value, but decreased by 3.3% in volume in the third quarter of 2024 compared with the preceding quarter.

Comparing the first three quarters of 2024 with the same period in 2023, total restaurant receipts decreased by 0.3% in value and 2.9% in volume.

To facilitate further understanding of the short-term business performance of the restaurants sector, statistics in respect of the restaurant receipts and purchases in individual months of the reference quarter are also compiled.

Analysed by month, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total receipts of the restaurants sector decreased by 4.2%, decreased by 2.3% and increased by 2.8% respectively in July, August and September 2024, compared with the corresponding months in 2023.

After discounting the effect of price changes, it was provisionally estimated that the volume of total restaurant receipts decreased by 6.4%, decreased by 4.3% and increased by 1.1% respectively in July, August and September 2024, compared with the corresponding months in 2023.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that the value of total restaurant receipts recorded a narrowed year-on-year decline of 1.3% in the third quarter of 2024. The business performance of restaurants improved through the quarter, with their total receipts resuming a year-on-year increase of 2.8% in September. Compared with the preceding quarter, the value of total restaurant receipts increased by 2.0% in the third quarter after adjusting for seasonal factors.

Looking ahead, the changing consumption patterns of visitors and residents will continue to affect the business performance of restaurants. Nevertheless, an improved outlook for the Mainland economy following the recent introduction of a wide range of stimulus measures, and the commencement of the US interest rate cut, would render support to catering spending. The SAR Government's various initiatives to boost market sentiment and increasing employment earnings would also benefit the sector.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures of restaurant receipts by type of restaurant and total purchases by the restaurants sector for the second quarter of 2024 as well as the provisional figures for the third quarter of 2024.

Table 2 and Table 3 present the revised value and volume indices respectively of restaurant receipts by type of restaurant for the second quarter of 2024 and the provisional indices for the third quarter of 2024.

Table 4 presents the year-on-year rate of change in total restaurant receipts in value and volume terms based on the original quarterly series, as well as the quarter-to-quarter rate of change based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The revised figures on restaurant receipts and purchases for the third quarter of 2024 (with breakdown by month) will be released through the website of C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode540.html) and relevant publications of the Department from December 20, 2024.

The classification of restaurants follows the Hong Kong Standard

Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Quarterly Survey of Restaurant Receipts and Purchases". Users can browse and download the publication at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080002&scode=540).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of C&SD (Tel: 3903 7401; e-mail: qsr@censtatd.gov.hk).

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on November 1 to noon today (November 4), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 297 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category, in the past three days (including last Saturday and Sunday). No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan"

(www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 150 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24, 2023, to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 98 179 samples of food imported from Japan (including 62 515 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 21 810 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.