

Green turtles returned to sea (with photo)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) released three green turtles in the southern waters of Hong Kong today (September 2).

Three green turtles were found in the waters near Tolo Harbour and Sai Kung earlier on by AFCD staff and members of public. Two of them were physically weak while the other one was trapped in a mini raft. Following rescue and initial check-ups by the AFCD, the green turtles were taken to Ocean Park Hong Kong (OPHK). They were examined in detail by veterinarians of OPHK and were kept under their monitoring and veterinary care.

An AFCD spokesman said, "The weights and carapace lengths of the three green turtles range from 10 to 26 kilograms and 43 to 57 centimetres respectively. All three green turtles were assessed by the veterinarians of OPHK as being in good condition and ready to return to the sea. The department is thankful to OPHK veterinarians and staff for taking good care of them."

Each of the green turtles was tagged with a microchip and an Inconel tag for future identification. A satellite transmitter was also attached to the carapace of each of the turtles. By tracking the movement and feeding grounds of green turtles in the sea, the AFCD can collect data for formulating appropriate conservation measures and will share its findings with other conservation authorities for better conservation of green turtles through concerted efforts.

The green turtle is a globally endangered species and is the only sea turtle species known to nest locally. In Hong Kong, all wild turtles (including sea turtles) are protected by the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). No person shall hunt or wilfully disturb, possess, sell or export sea turtles. Otherwise, they will be liable to a maximum fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year. The specimens will also be forfeited upon conviction.

In addition, all sea turtle species are listed in Appendix I to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and regulated under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) (the Ordinance) in Hong Kong. The import, introduction from the sea, export, re-export or possession of specimens of sea turtles not in accordance with the Ordinance is an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years, and the specimens will also be forfeited.

Members of the public are urged to report any sighting of sea turtles or suspected irregularities involving sea turtles to the AFCD on 1823.



Public transport services in Queen's Hill

The Transport Department (TD) today (September 2) said that the TD has been very concerned about the transportation needs of the Queen's Hill residents, and has been keeping close contact with public transport operators on coordinating service arrangements.

To accommodate the transportation needs between Queen's Hill and other areas in the district, the TD has coordinated with KMB and green minibus (GMB) operator to deploy additional resources to strengthen the services of KMB Route 78A to/from Fanling and the services of NT GMB Route 503K to/from Sheung Shui. The public transport operators have also arranged staff stationed at stops in Queen's Hill during peak hours to manage passengers queueing and adjust vehicle deployment when necessary.

Regarding the first school day on September 1, the TD deployed staff on site to monitor the situation. More passengers were observed during the busiest period in the morning peak hours (around 7am – 8am), nevertheless, passengers of KMB Route 78A were able to board within five minutes on average, and passengers of GMB were also able to board within 10 minutes in general. However, the journeys of some GMB trips were affected by busy traffic and illegal parking along Lung Sum Avenue, Lung Ma Road and Ma Sik Road, therefore some GMBs were not able to return to the Queen's Hill GMB terminus as scheduled, and passengers had longer waiting time between 7.30am and 8am.

To smoothen the public transport services in Queen's Hill, the TD reviewed the service arrangements with KMB and GMB operator yesterday and implemented improvement measures today, which included deployment of mobile Octopus processor and arranging two buses to pick up passengers simultaneously by KMB at Queen's Hill bus terminus, so as to shorten the passengers boarding time. In addition, the Police has stepped up enforcement

against illegal parking in the region, which alleviated the impact on GMB journeys to facilitate more regular services. The TD deployed staff to monitor the transport services in Queen's Hill today, and observed that the queueing and boarding for bus services were in order and the operation of GMB was also normal. Passengers were able to board GMB within 10 minutes overall.

To further enhance the public transport services in Queen's Hill, the TD has coordinated with KMB to operate two special departures to serve schools in Fanling (South) and Sheung Shui (South) during the morning peak hours to cater for the students' transportation demand with effect from next Monday (September 5).

The TD will continue to closely monitor the public transport demands in Queen's Hill to review and improve the public transport services to cater for the commuting needs of residents as and when necessary.

Government updates testing requirements prior to visits to RCHs

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (September 2) that, due to the continued occurrence of confirmed cases among residents and/or staff members in residential care homes (RCHs), visitors' testing requirements prior to their visits to RCHs will be updated according to the advice of the health authorities in order to safeguard the health of frail elderly people and persons with disabilities in RCHs.

From September 5 onwards, all visitors (except for official visitors), apart from continuing to fulfil the Government's COVID-19 vaccination requirements as set out in the Vaccine Pass, are required to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 (PCR tests), with the specimen collected from the visitor within 48 hours prior to the visit, and provide negative PCR test results in order to visit RCHs.

Visitors may opt for Community Testing Centres (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en) or mobile specimen collection stations (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/station/), where free testing services will be provided if they indicate to the staff on-site that the purpose of the testing is for fulfilling the requirements for visiting RCHs. Visitors can also undergo self-arranged testing at their own expense at private laboratories that are recognised by the Department of Health (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories_RTPCR.pdf) and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results. The relevant sample must be taken through combined nasal and throat swabs and must not be taken by the person to be tested. Taking into account the epidemic developments and the protection of RCH residents as the priority target group, recovered persons who have tested positive in the past three months are also required

to undergo the above PCR tests.

The Government understands that the relevant arrangement may bring inconvenience to the residents and their families, and appeals to all parties concerned to co-operate with the Government to achieve the prime objective of protecting the residents.

Number of Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme policies exceeds 1 million

The Health Bureau announced today (September 2) that the number of Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (VHIS) policies has exceeded 1 million with the support of citizens after three years of implementation, signifying a new milestone for the development of medical insurance in Hong Kong.

Even though the overall medical insurance market has been affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, the VHIS recorded steady growth. The latest verified figures show that the number of policies of the Certified Plans has reached 1 045 000 (as at March 31 this year) after three years of implementation of the VHIS. Among all, more than half (53 per cent) of the insured persons are below the age of 40, and about one-third (33 per cent) are under 30. It is encouraging to note that the VHIS has been effective in attracting younger individuals to take out insurance policies and prepare for their future medical needs.

As reflected by the latest figures, most of the insurance claims (93 per cent) in 2021 were successful, with around 39 per cent of them receiving full reimbursement, around 65 per cent having a reimbursement ratio of 90 per cent or above, and around 78 per cent having a reimbursement ratio of 80 per cent or above. For all claim cases in the entire year, the overall reimbursement ratio of VHIS insurance claims averaged around 89 per cent. This demonstrates that the VHIS can provide sufficient protection to insured persons, and is of substantial help to citizens in covering their medical expenses and using medical services with ease.

The Government expressed gratitude to the insurance sector for their active participation in the VHIS by offering diversified products to cater for the needs of different consumers. As at August 31 this year, 86 Certified Plans are available in the market, including 32 Standard Plans and 54 Flexi Plans (of which relevant products provide protection beyond that of the Standard Plans), with a total of 385 product options for public's selection.

The VHIS is attractive in various aspects, including guaranteed renewal up to the age of 100 regardless of any change in the health conditions of the insured persons, no limit on "lifetime benefit", coverage extended to unknown pre-existing conditions and day case surgical procedures (including

endoscopy), and more. Furthermore, taxpayers who pay the premium for themselves or specified relatives (including spouse and children, as well as the taxpayer's or his/her spouse's grandparents, parents and siblings) can claim tax deductions.

A Government spokesman said, "Since its full implementation on April 1, 2019, the VHIS aims to offer more options and facilitate citizens' access to regulated health insurance products and private healthcare services. We will review the effectiveness of the scheme from time to time in a bid to ensure that the VHIS can effectively achieve its intended objectives.

"The Government will continue to work closely with the insurance sector and refine the VHIS in a timely manner, such as the benefit items, service charges and claim limits under the coverage. This is to ensure that the VHIS can keep abreast with the latest trends in the healthcare market, thus providing sufficient protection to our citizens through the Certified Plans under the scheme.

"The viability of the VHIS hinges on the pricing of private healthcare services. The latter also determines citizens' access to private healthcare services when they are in need, thereby alleviating the burden on the public healthcare system. We will strive to enhance the price transparency of private healthcare services and protect the welfare of patients."

The Government encourages citizens to purchase suitable VHIS products based on their actual needs, so as to secure protection for themselves and their family members for rainy days. The VHIS website (www.vhis.gov.hk) has set up a Consumer Corner to enable citizens to make comparisons of the details, features and premium information of the products offered by various insurance companies, and hence choose the Certified Plans that best suit their needs and budget.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 0.00am today (September 2), a total of 2 667 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 are currently hospitalised for treatment, including 350 new patients. Among the patients staying in isolation facilities, 506 patients are in isolation wards, 163 patients are in second-tier isolation wards, 650 patients are in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre and 210 patients are in the Treatment Centre for COVID-19 (AsiaWorld-Expo), of which 235 in total are new patients. There are six newly reported critical patients and nine newly reported serious patients. There are a total of 48 patients in critical condition and 54 are in serious

condition, of which 13 critical patients are receiving intensive care. Moreover, there are 302 patients who have recovered, including 271 patients who have been discharged. In addition, eight patients who passed away in public hospitals were reported.

In the fifth wave of the epidemic, there are 63 367 patients who have recovered so far, including 63 032 patients who have been discharged. And since early 2020, there are 75 747 patients who have recovered, including 75 412 patients who have been discharged.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.