

FHB announces the first incidence for latest smoking prevalence rate in Hong Kong to attain single digit

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, announced today (May 26) that the smoking prevalence rate in Hong Kong has dropped continuously from 23.3 per cent in the early 1980s to 9.5 per cent in 2021. It is the first time for the latest smoking prevalence rate to attain a single digit.

The Census and Statistics Department today published the latest Thematic Household Survey (THS) Report. According to the THS Report, about 581 000 persons were found to be daily conventional cigarette smokers at the time of the survey conducted from April to July last year, accounting for 9.5 per cent of the local population aged 15 and above. Corresponding figure in 2019 was 10.2 per cent.

"It is an important milestone in Hong Kong's tobacco control effort with the smoking prevalence rate dropped to a single digit, but yet we cannot afford complacency. We will continue to further reduce the smoking prevalence rate in Hong Kong proactively through multi-pronged approach, including legislation, taxation, health education and co-operation with community partners to take forward more focused smoking cessation services, so as to safeguard the health of Hong Kong citizens." Professor Chan said.

For alternative smoking products (ASPs), according to the THS Report, the percentage of daily electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) smokers aged 15 and above in the population was 0.3 per cent in 2021 (some 17 500 persons in actual figure), while the corresponding percentage was 0.1 per cent in 2019 (some 7 200 persons in actual figure). For heated tobacco products (HTPs), the survey found that the percentage of daily HTP smokers aged 15 and above in the population was 0.1 per cent (some 8 400 persons in actual figure), while the corresponding percentage was 0.2 per cent in 2019 (some 13 100 persons in actual figure).

On the other hand, the Food and Health Bureau commissioned the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong to conduct a school-based survey from December 2020 to December 2021 on smoking pattern among Primary and Secondary students (HKU Study). According to the HKU Study, the smoking prevalence rate among Primary and Secondary students remained low, but the percentage of Secondary students smoking e-cigarettes has increased. The HKU Study also found that 1.1 per cent of Secondary 1 to Secondary 6 students claimed in the 2020/21 school year that they were smoking e-cigarettes at the time, while 0.8 per cent was recorded in 2019.

Professor Chan pointed out that given the harm of ASPs posed to local public health, it is necessary for the Government to take action even when the number of ASP smokers among Primary and Secondary students remained low,

and to ban ASPs through legislation so as to stop them from further infiltrating Hong Kong before it becomes popular in Hong Kong. Since the Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 (Amendment Ordinance) came into effect on April 30, 2022, no person may import, promote, manufacture, sell, or possess for commercial purposes ASPs, including e-cigarettes, HTPs and herbal cigarettes. The Government hopes that the prevalence rate of using ASPs will decrease with the Amendment Ordinance coming into effect.

Looking ahead, Professor Chan said that the Government will enhance tobacco control measures, including measures to reduce non-smokers from picking up the smoking habit and provide full support to smokers to quit smoking, in a comprehensive manner with a view to further lowering smoking prevalence rate. The Government will also work closely with various partners to strengthen public education and research projects so as to explore new initiatives to enhance smoking cessation services, especially those services and relevant policy measures targeting adolescent, women, as well as e-cigarette and HTP smokers. The Department of Health will launch the "Quit in June" campaign, and work in collaboration with the Hospital Authority, District Health Centres/District Health Centre Expresses, the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health and other medical institutions in assisting people to quit smoking and promoting tobacco-free life.

"In order to achieve the long-term goal of eliminating smoking hazard, the Government will make reference to experiences from other places and actively carry out the formulation of Tobacco Endgame, provide a timetable and roadmap, and launch a comprehensive tobacco control strategy to safeguard public health. The Government is exploring along the directions of reducing public exposure to second-hand smoke, curtailing the attractiveness of smoking products and eliminating the harm of smoking products to the next generation. The Government plans to consult the public on the proposal within this year. The next-term Government will continue to promote tobacco control work with a view to achieving a smoke-free Hong Kong," Professor Chan said.

Further extension of application period of Anti-epidemic Support Scheme for Environmental Hygiene and Security Staff in Property Management Sector

The Home Affairs Department (HAD) announced today (May 26) that the Government will extend the application period of the Anti-epidemic Support Scheme for Environmental Hygiene and Security Staff in the Property Management Sector (ASPM) to June 30.

The HAD launched the ASPM with the aim to provide each frontline property management (PM) worker performing duties relating to environmental hygiene or security in private residential, composite (i.e. commercial cum residential), industrial and commercial (including shopping malls) building blocks (hereinafter referred to as "eligible building blocks") a monthly allowance of \$2,000 for five months (February to June 2022)

The HAD spokesman expressed that, since the launch of the ASPM on February 28, HAD had been keeping in view the needs of the PM sector, and announced enhancement measures on April 29. HAD also jointly organised recently a briefing session via video conferencing with the Property Management Services Authority (PMSA) for the PM sector, to remind the trade the details of the enhancement measures and application method of the ASPM. Given the large number of premises within eligible building blocks, HAD understood that PM companies, Deed of Mutual Covenant Managers or Owners' Corporations/Organisations would require time to collect and collate frontline PM worker applications submitted by premises, and therefore decided to further extend the application due date to June 30, so that the PM sector can have more time to submit applications, benefiting more frontline PM workers.

As at May 26, the PMSA has received more than 17 000 applications, which will benefit over 180 000 frontline PM workers, and over 2 700 applications have been approved, involving nearly \$600 million, benefiting over 6 200 buildings.

The HAD thanked the PM sector for actively responding and supporting the enhancement measures under the ASPM, and appealed strongly again to eligible applicant organisations and premises to uphold corporate social responsibility and civic responsibility, following an inclusive and fair principle, and submit applications for all frontline PM workers serving eligible building blocks (including premises therein) to the PMSA promptly, so that they can receive subsidies as soon as possible.

For details on the ASPM, please contact the PMSA at 3696 1156 or 3696 1166, or visit the ASPM thematic website (aspm.pmsa.org.hk).

Extension of special visiting arrangements in public hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) spokesperson announced today (May 26) that the special visiting arrangements will be extended to other acute and specialist hospitals with inpatient services, and child and adolescent psychiatric wards or units from next Tuesday (May 31) (details shown in the

Appendix).

The HA spokesperson said, "The HA understands the desire of relatives to visit patients. Having considered the latest stabilised epidemic situation, the HA decided to further extend the special visiting arrangements to other public hospitals in order to address their needs."

For patients with a high physical dependence, hospitals will contact relatives to offer early appointments if situations allow. For child and adolescent psychiatric patients, the special visiting arrangements are applicable to patients below the age of 18 who have been transferred out of observation areas. With the exception of patients staying in intensive care units, infectious disease or isolation wards, other psychiatric wards and wards or cubicles admitting COVID-19 patients, one to two visits by one registered visitor will be arranged for each patient every week, with a one hour duration for each visit. Hospital staff will contact relatives in the next few days for appointments. Relatives are not required to call the hospital for booking themselves.

Visitors are required to comply with the requirement of the Vaccine Pass, including having received the required dosage of COVID-19 vaccine, or being recovered persons of COVID-19 in the Government's record, and holding the relevant vaccination record or a record of a recovered person.

In addition, visitors must provide either a nucleic acid test negative result obtained within 48 hours, or a rapid antigen test negative result obtained within 24 hours before the visit. Visitors who have recovered from COVID-19 within 90 days (starting from the 14th day after receiving confirmation of infection) will be exempted from the testing requirements if they can provide relevant proof of infection and recovery.

The special visiting arrangements are not applicable for persons having a COVID-19 Vaccination Medical Exemption Certificate with a valid exemption of Vaccine Pass. The HA spokesperson said, "Public hospitals are unable to arrange visits for unvaccinated individuals since they are at higher risk of infection. It is to protect them from being infected, as well as to protect patients and healthcare staff."

The requirements for the Vaccine Pass and COVID-19 testing also apply to compassionate visits under specific circumstances. The compassionate visiting arrangements for critical or end-of-life patients will remain unchanged.

All visitors entering public hospitals are required to comply with the infection control measures such as wearing surgical masks, temperature checking and filling in health declaration forms. Visitors are advised to complete the health declaration form found on the HA webpage or the mobile app "HA Go" 24 hours before the visit and show the QR code generated by the system to ward staff. Moreover, visitors are also required to observe the requirements of the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code when entering public hospitals.

The HA hopes the patients' family members can understand and comply with the visiting arrangements under the current epidemic situation. All hospitals will continue to facilitate compassionate and video visiting as far as practicable.

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Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 0.00am today (May 26), a total of 447 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 are currently hospitalised for treatment, including 55 new patients. Among the patients staying in isolation facilities, 75 patients are in isolation wards, 10 patients are in second-tier isolation wards and 38 patients are in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, of which 18 in total are new patients. Among the hospitalised patients, 11 of them are in critical condition and nine are in serious condition, of which five critical patients are receiving intensive care. There were 85 patients who have recovered, including 59 patients who have been discharged. In addition, two patients who passed away in public hospitals were reported.

In the fifth wave of the epidemic, there are 50 024 patients who have recovered so far, including 49 718 patients who have been discharged. And since early 2020, there are 62 404 patients who have recovered, including 62 098 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.