

Monthly gravidtrap index for Aedes albopictus in December 2021 drops further

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (January 21) announced that the monthly gravidtrap index for *Aedes albopictus* in December 2021 further dropped to 0.1 per cent, lower than that of 2.2 per cent in November last year. The index in December remained at Level 1 at its lowest, indicating that distribution of *Aedes albopictus* in the areas surveyed was not extensive.

Among the 64 survey areas, no area recorded a gravidtrap index exceeding the alert level of 20 per cent. Moreover, the monthly density index for *Aedes albopictus* in December last year was 1, which represented that an average of one *Aedes albopictus* adult was found in the *Aedes*-positive gravidtraps, indicating that the number of adult *Aedes albopictus* was not high in the areas surveyed. The gravidtrap and density indices for *Aedes albopictus* in different areas and information on mosquito prevention and control measures are available on the department's website at www.fehd.gov.hk.

Despite the index drops further and remains at a low level, the breeding and activity of mosquitoes will continue in winter. It is hoped that the community would continue to work together with the Government in mosquito control and prevention. The FEHD launched its territory-wide year-end clean-up campaign on January 8, during which mosquito prevention and control work will be enhanced, including carrying out inspections, removing stagnant water, applying insecticide and disposing of abandoned water containers weekly to prevent mosquito breeding, and trimming of grass to discourage resting of adult mosquitoes on the site. At the same time, the FEHD and relevant government departments will continue the above mosquito prevention and control work in areas under their purview and strengthen publicity and education work.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "Effective mosquito control requires the sustained effort of all parties concerned. The community must work together with the Government to carry out effective mosquito control measures."

The FEHD appeals to members of the public to continue to carry out mosquito prevention and control measures including inspecting their homes and surroundings to remove potential breeding grounds, changing the water in vases and scrubbing the inner surfaces, removing the water in saucers under potted plants at least once a week, properly disposing of containers such as soft drink cans and lunch boxes, and drilling large holes in unused tyres. The FEHD also advises members of the public and estate management bodies to keep drains free of blockage and level all defective ground surfaces to prevent the accumulation of water. They should also scrub all drains and surface sewers with an alkaline detergent at least once a week to remove any mosquito eggs.

Aedes albopictus is a kind of mosquito that can transmit dengue fever (DF) as well as Zika virus infection. DF is commonly found in tropical and subtropical regions of the world, and has become endemic in many countries in Southeast Asia. The dengue activity in neighbouring areas has remained high and Hong Kong has recorded two imported DF cases so far since last year.

Eight persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations (with photo)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations and a joint operation with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" for two consecutive days (January 19 and 20). A total of seven suspected illegal workers and one suspected employer were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided five target locations including a recycling yard, residential buildings and a retail shop. One suspected illegal worker and one suspected employer were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal worker is a woman, aged 42. Furthermore, one woman, aged 61, was suspected of employing the illegal worker.

In addition, during the "Champion" operation, enforcement officers raided five target locations in Ta Kwu Ling, Lok Ma Chau and Sha Tau Kok districts including recycling yards and warehouses. Six suspected illegal workers were arrested. The suspected illegal workers comprised five men and one woman, aged 27 to 45. Among them, three men and one woman were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him or her shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum

penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law by employing illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct an initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the ImmD officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter or temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.



Business expectations for the first quarter of 2022

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (January 21) the results of the Quarterly Business Tendency Survey for the first quarter (Q1) of 2022.

Business Situation

For all surveyed sectors taken together, the proportion of respondents expecting their business situation to be better (14%) in Q1 2022 over the preceding quarter is slightly higher than that expecting it to be worse (13%). The results are broadly the same as those of the Q4 2021 round of survey.

Analysed by sector, while the number of the surveyed sectors with respondents expecting their business situation to be better on balance in Q1 2022 as compared with Q4 2021 is the same as the number of surveyed sectors expecting a worse business situation, more respondents in the construction sector and the retail sector expect their business situation to be worse in Q1 2022 as compared with Q4 2021.

The results of the survey should be interpreted with care. In this type of survey on expectations, the views collected in the survey are affected by the events in the community occurring around the time of enumeration, and it is difficult to establish precisely the extent to which respondents' perception of the future accords with the underlying trends. The enumeration period for this survey round was from December 2, 2021 to January 11, 2022, while the Government announced on January 5, 2022 the tightening of social distancing measures with effect from January 7.

Volume of Business/Output

Respondents in quite a number of the surveyed sectors expect their volume of business/output to increase on balance or remain broadly unchanged in Q1 2022 as compared with Q4 2021. In particular, more respondents in the accommodation and food services sector expect their volume of business to increase in Q1 2022 over Q4 2021. In the manufacturing sector and the retail sector, however, more respondents expect their volume of production/sales to decrease in Q1 2022 over Q4 2021.

Employment

Respondents in all of the surveyed sectors expect their employment to remain broadly unchanged or increase on balance in Q1 2022 as compared with Q4 2021. In particular, slightly more respondents in the financing and insurance; real estate; construction; accommodation and food services; and transportation, storage and courier services sectors expect their employment to increase in Q1 2022 over Q4 2021.

Selling Price/Service Charge

Respondents in all of the surveyed sectors expect their selling prices/service charges to remain broadly unchanged or go up on balance in Q1 2022 as compared with Q4 2021. In particular, more respondents in the accommodation and food services; transportation, storage and courier services; and real estate sectors expect their prices of food provided/service charges to go up in Q1 2022 over Q4 2021.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that business sentiment among large enterprises remained stable as compared to three months ago. Hiring sentiment also held steady in overall terms. However, it should be noted that the latest survey results, largely reflecting the business sentiment in December 2021, have yet to fully reflect the impact of the latest wave of local epidemic.

The spokesman pointed out that while the tightened social distancing measures in response to the local epidemic development will likely weigh on business sentiment of the related sectors in the near term, the latest round of measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund should provide some relief. It is thus essential for the community to abide by the anti-epidemic measures and strive towards wider coverage of vaccination, so as to put the local epidemic under control as swiftly as possible. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Further Information

The survey gathers views on short-term business performance from the senior management of about 560 prominent establishments in various sectors in Hong Kong with a view to providing a quick reference, with minimum time lag, for predicting the short-term future economic performance of the local economy.

The survey covers 10 major sectors in Hong Kong, namely manufacturing; construction; import/export trade and wholesale; retail; accommodation and food services (mainly covering services rendered by hotels and restaurants); transportation, storage and courier services; information and communications; financing and insurance; real estate; and professional and business services sectors.

Views collected in the survey refer only to those of respondents on their own establishments rather than those on the respective sectors they are engaged in, and are limited to the expected direction of quarter-to-quarter change (e.g. "up", "same" or "down") but not the magnitude of change. In collecting views on the quarter-to-quarter changes, if the variable in question is subject to seasonal variations, respondents are asked to provide the expected changes after excluding the normal seasonal variations.

Survey results are generally presented as "net balance", i.e. the difference between the percentage of respondents choosing "up" and that choosing "down". The percentage distribution of respondents among various response categories (e.g. "up", "same" and "down") reflects how varied their business expectations are. The "net balance", with its appropriate sign, indicates the direction of expected change in the variable concerned. A positive sign indicates a likely upward trend while a negative sign indicates a likely downward trend. However, the magnitude of the "net balance" reflects only the prevalence of optimism or pessimism, but not the magnitude of expected change, since information relating to such magnitude is not collected in the survey.

Furthermore, owing to sample size constraint, care should be taken in interpreting survey results involving a small percentage (e.g. less than 10%) of respondents in individual sectors.

Chart 1 shows the views on expected changes in business situation for the period Q1 2021 to Q1 2022.

Table 1 shows the net balances of views on expectations in respect of different variables for Q1 2022.

The survey results are published in greater detail in the "Report on Quarterly Business Tendency Survey, Q1 2022". Users can download the publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1110008&scode=300).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Business Expectation Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7263; email: business-prospects@censtatd.gov.hk).

Hong Kong Customs continues to step up enforcement against counterfeit goods activities with approach of Lunar New Year (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (January 20) conducted a special operation in Mong Kok to combat the sale of counterfeit goods and seized about 6 100 items of suspected counterfeit goods with an estimated market value of about \$1.9 million.

Customs earlier conducted patrols and discovered some hawker stalls selling suspected counterfeit goods in Mong Kok. After investigation, Customs officers took enforcement action yesterday and raided a number of fixed-pitch and mobile hawker stalls, and two upstairs counterfeit goods storage centres on Tung Choi Street. The batch of suspected counterfeit goods, including handbags, leather goods and sports footwear, was seized.

During the operation, a 61-year-old man and a 41-year-old woman were arrested.

Investigation is ongoing.

With the Lunar New Year around the corner, Customs reiterates that it will continue to step up inspection and enforcement to vigorously combat different kinds of counterfeit goods activities before and during the holiday.

Customs reminds consumers to procure goods at reputable shops and to check with the trademark owners or their authorised agents if the authenticity of a product is in doubt. Also, traders should be cautious and prudent in merchandising since the sale of counterfeit goods is a serious crime and offenders are liable to criminal sanctions.

Under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance, any person who sells or possesses for sale any goods with a forged trademark commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Members of the public may report any suspected infringing activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



[Preliminary report on Ozone Buzz Z5 paraglider accident released](#)

The Air Accident Investigation Authority (AAIA) today (January 21) released the Accident Investigation Preliminary Report 1/2022 on an accident involving an Ozone Buzz Z5 Paraglider that descended towards a bush area west of Shek O Peak, Hong Kong Island, with the pilot fatally injured on December 23, 2021.

A spokesperson for the AAIA said that the preliminary report contains information relating to the accident at the time of issue, and should be regarded as tentative.

"The investigation team is conducting detailed analysis of the data and information collected in order to determine the circumstances and causes of this occurrence in conjunction with identifying areas for further investigation or lines of inquiry to follow up," the spokesperson said.

The full Accident Investigation Preliminary Report 1/2022 is available for download from the AAIA webpage (www.thb.gov.hk/aaia/eng/investigation_reports/index.html).