

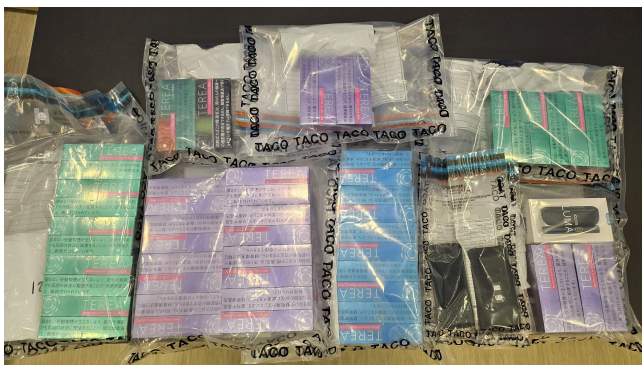
[DH's operation against illegal sale of alternative smoking products \(with photo\)](#)

The Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health (DH) today (June 21) conducted an enforcement operation against the illegal sale of alternative smoking products (ASPs). A heated tobacco device and a batch of 6 000 suspected ASPs were seized during the operation.

Through intelligence analysis and in-depth investigations, officers of the TACO today conducted a decoy operation by posing as customers to contact people suspected of selling ASPs illegally. In the operation, officers also initiated investigation against a 41-year-old man for suspecting of selling ASPs and possessing ASPs for commercial purposes. Charges will be laid against offender(s) when sufficient evidence is found.

The Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) prohibits the promotion, manufacture, sale and possession for commercial purposes of ASPs. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

A spokesman for the DH said that the department will continue to take stringent enforcement action. The spokesman also cautioned against the use of any ASPs and stressed that these products contain amounts of nicotine similar to those of conventional cigarettes in order to sustain addiction. In addition, health hazards of long-term exposure to these new products are unknown. The Government appeals to smokers to quit smoking as early as possible for their own health and that of others. They are encouraged to call the DH's Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline on 1833 183. The hotline is operated by registered nurses and provides professional counselling services on smoking cessation. Information on smoking cessation can also be obtained from www.livetobaccofree.hk/en/index.html.



Speech by SFST at Partners Group Hong Kong Office Grand Opening Event (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, at the Partners Group Hong Kong Office Grand Opening Event today (June 21):

Chairman Meister (Executive Chairman of Partners Group, Mr Steffen Meister), Mrs Zilweger (Deputy Consul-General of Switzerland in Hong Kong, Mrs Francoise Madeleine Killias Zillweger), Mr Jaeggi (Co-President of Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, Mr Benno Jaeggi), Dr Lu (Partners Group's Chairman of Asia, Dr Kevin Lu) , Mr Chui (Head of Private Wealth Asia Pacific and Office Head of Partners Group Hong Kong, Mr Henry Chui), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Good evening.

It is my distinct pleasure to be here tonight at this cocktail ceremony. I feel deeply honoured to join you all in celebrating Partners Group's exciting new expansion in Hong Kong. As one of the leading global firms in the private markets industry, Partners Group is a listed company on the SIX Swiss Exchange, managing nearly US\$150 billion across 21 global offices with 1 900 dedicated employees.

I am delighted that Partners Group has chosen Hong Kong as the destination for its expansion, further strengthening our strategic position in the Asian market. Your presence here will enrich Hong Kong's offerings for global investors, as you bring with your new presence expertise and experience in managing private equity, private credit, infrastructure, real estate, and royalties.

Indeed, this is an opportune moment for asset and wealth management businesses to establish themselves or expand in Hong Kong. We have emerged as the primary investment hub for global wealth and asset owners. Our competitive advantages include abundant investment opportunities, an unparalleled financial and professional services sector, and unwavering support from the Government. As of the end of 2022, our assets under management reached an impressive US\$4 trillion, with 64 per cent of funds originating from non-Hong Kong investors. Additionally, Hong Kong now stands as the second-largest cross-border wealth management centre globally, and we are poised to become the largest booking centre by 2027 for wealth management business, according to industry research.

Across the globe, investors are diversifying and seeking better returns by allocating capital to alternative asset classes such as private equity, hedge funds, real estate, private credit, commodities, infrastructure, and virtual assets. In Hong Kong, alternative investments have experienced remarkable growth, with the city managing the lion's share of alternative assets within the Asia Pacific region. Over half of the major hedge funds in

Asia call Hong Kong home. We boast approximately 650 private equity and venture capital firms, with nearly 60 per cent serving as regional headquarters. Collectively, they oversee assets worth US\$228 billion, second only to Mainland China. Notably, almost 90 per cent of high-net-worth investors in Hong Kong intend to increase their allocations to alternative assets, signalling immense potential for our market.

The Hong Kong Government remains committed to creating an enabling environment for asset and wealth managers. In the past years, we introduced various measures to enhance our holistic offerings for global wealth owners. Tax and financial incentives for funds and single-family offices, the diversified open-ended fund company and limited partnership fund regimes—and a complementing re-domiciliation mechanism for funds—all underscore our strategic commitment to support the industry's development. Furthermore, the New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme, launched in March 2024, aims to inject more capital into Hong Kong's market and empower investors to seize opportunities and pursue development in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong abounds with quality investment projects. Our recent focus on innovation and technology has led us to prioritise four key sectors: artificial intelligence and data analytics, life and health technology, fintech and advanced manufacturing, and new energy and materials. The Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises actively attracts outstanding companies from these sectors to settle in Hong Kong, while our Science Park and Cyberport serve as nurturing grounds for technology startups.

For those seeking to invest in the next wave of unicorns, Hong Kong is the place to be. Whether you're considering IPOs (initial public offerings) or exploring investment opportunities, our stock market offers an ideal avenue. Thanks to a series of listing reforms, our platform has become even more competitive, facilitating the listing of new economy companies, pre-revenue biotechnology firms, and specialist technology enterprises.

I've only scratched the surface of the initiatives we're diligently working on. These policies and plans underscore our commitment to continuously enhance Hong Kong's ecosystem as a thriving international financial centre.

Partners Group's expansion stands as a testament to Hong Kong's pivotal role in the global financial world. Your dedication, along with that of other wealth managers, will significantly shape the evolution of private markets into a mainstream asset class.

Once again, my heartfelt congratulations to Partners Group, and a warm welcome to you as you join our vibrant asset and wealth management ecosystem. May this evening be enjoyable, and may your success continue to flourish in the years ahead.



CHP reports investigation of leprosy case

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (June 21) reported an investigation of a leprosy case, and reiterated that the transmission risk of leprosy in Hong Kong is low and the disease does not spread easily among people.

The case involved a 30-year-old woman with good past health, who developed a skin rash on her arm since early May. She attended Tseung Kwan O Hospital for medical attention on May 23 and was admitted for treatment. Her skin biopsy specimen was positive for leprosy upon laboratory testing. She is in stable condition. Initial enquiries by the CHP revealed that the patient stayed in the Philippines during the incubation period before arriving in Hong Kong in late April. Her home contacts in Hong Kong are currently asymptomatic and under medical surveillance. Further assessments will be provided for the home contacts. The CHP's investigations are ongoing.

Leprosy (Hansen's disease) is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae* which can be transmitted by nasal droplets or by close skin contact.

A spokesman for the CHP stressed that the disease will only be transmitted through prolonged and close contact over months to years with leprosy patient not being treated at all. The disease does not spread easily between people through casual contact with a leprosy patient, such as shaking hands or hugging, sharing meals or sitting next to each other. Also, the disease does not spread through sex or pass to the fetus during pregnancy. The patient stops transmitting the disease as soon as they started treatment.

The disease affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract, and the eyes of infected persons. Symptoms may occur within one year after infection but can also take as long as 20 years or even more to occur. Without treatment, loss of sensation and disability can occur.

The spokesman reiterated that leprosy is curable and early treatment can prevent disability. Antibiotics used for effective treatment of leprosy in form of multi-drug therapy (rifampicin, clofazimine and dapsone) are readily available in Hong Kong.

Leprosy is a notifiable infectious disease in Hong Kong. The number of cases reported has declined significantly from above 100 in the early 1970s to between 20 and 30 in the early 1990s. This can be attributed to improvements in the health of the general population and better health and sanitation facilities. The number of cases reported ranged from one to nine cases annually between 2014 and 2023. Among them, the majority (above 80 per cent) were imported cases with a history of prolonged stays outside Hong Kong, and the remaining cases were either relapses of past infections or older adults who acquired the infection decades ago. Among the new cases, none were found to lead to disabilities. The CHP will continue to monitor the situation.

Globally, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), leprosy occurs in more than 120 countries, with more than 200 000 new cases reported every year. Although there has been a gradual reduction in the number of cases globally, Brazil, India and Indonesia still reported more than 10 000 new cases each year from 2018 to 2022, while some countries like the Philippines, Nepal, Myanmar, etc reported 1 000 to 10 000 new cases each year during the same period. Therefore, early diagnosis, especially for people with prolonged stays in leprosy prevalent countries, is crucial.

According to the WHO, there is strong evidence that Bacillus Calmette–Guérin (BCG) vaccination is effective in preventing leprosy and has contributed to the decline in the incidence of the disease globally. In Hong Kong, BCG is given at birth with very high coverage rates approaching 100 per cent all along. With the high coverage of BCG vaccine in the local population and being a disease that does not spread easily among people, the transmission risk of leprosy in Hong Kong is low.

For more information, please visit the CHP webpage featuring leprosy at (www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/24/107984.html).

CFS conducts blitz enforcement operation against food labelling irregularities (with photo)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (June 21) that the CFS conducted a blitz operation against irregularities in the labelling of prepackaged food products on June 19. During the operation, CFS officers found that prepackaged food products

not in compliance with food labelling laws in Hong Kong were sold at a collection point of an online platform, which was suspected of contravening the requirements under the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W) (the Regulations). Should there be sufficient evidence, prosecution will be instituted against the vendor concerned. The investigation is ongoing.

A spokesman for the CFS said that it will continue to monitor and ensure compliance of relevant food safety and labelling laws of prepackaged food products for sale in Hong Kong, including food products sold by online platforms.

According to the Regulations, unless exempted in Schedule four and six of the Regulations or otherwise stated, prepackaged food shall be marked and labelled in the manner prescribed in the Regulations. Any person who advertises for sale, sells or manufactures for sale any prepackaged food which is not marked or labelled in compliance with the Regulations commits an offence and is liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months upon conviction.

The spokesman reminded members of the public to patronise licensed food premises and online shops with appropriate permits when purchasing restricted food, and pay attention to the potential food safety risks when purchasing food online. The CFS has also published advice for food businesses and consumers on online grocery shopping and delivery, which is accessible at the CFS website

(www.cfs.gov.hk/english/food_leg/guidelines/Online_Grocery_Trade_e.pdf).



[27 persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations \(with photo\)](#)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Contribute" and "Twilight", and

joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion", "Powerplayer" and "Windsand", for four consecutive days from June 17 to yesterday (June 20). A total of 16 suspected illegal workers, three suspected employers, one suspected aider and abettor, three overstayers and four illegal immigrants were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 19 target locations including premises under renovation, restaurants and a retail shop. Seven suspected illegal workers and one suspected employer were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised five men and two women, aged 23 to 44. Among the arrested persons, two men and one woman were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. One man, aged 63, was suspected of employing the illegal workers and was also arrested.

During operation "Champion" and "Powerplayer", enforcement officers raided 118 target locations in Eastern, New Territories North and Western districts. Nine suspected illegal workers, two suspected employers, one suspected aider and abettor, three overstayers and four illegal immigrants were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised six men and three women, aged 27 to 59. Two men, aged 48 and 64, were suspected of employing the illegal workers, were arrested. One man, aged 73, who was suspected of aiding and abetting a person who breached the condition of stay in Hong Kong, was arrested. The arrested overstayers comprised three women, aged 42 to 51. The arrested illegal immigrants comprised three men and one woman, aged 27 to 57. Among them, nine suspected illegal workers, two suspected employers, one suspected aider and abettor and two overstayers were handled by the ImmD.

An ImmD spokesman said, "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."

The spokesman warned, "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 reminded 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.

