

Public hospitals continue to suspend special visiting arrangement

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

In view of the latest epidemic developments, the Hospital Authority (HA) today (January 20) announced the continued suspension of the special visiting arrangement at public hospitals until further announcement. Visits under compassionate considerations will be arranged according to patients' conditions and the operation of the wards/units.

"For pre-arranged compassionate visits under specific circumstances, the visitors must have completed two-dose COVID-19 vaccination for 14 days, and must provide either a negative COVID-19 nucleic acid test result obtained within 48 hours or provide a negative COVID-19 rapid antigen test result obtained within 24 hours," the HA spokesman said.

"For compassionate visits under emergency situations, such as visiting the critically ill or end-of-life visits, visitors must provide a negative COVID-19 nucleic acid test result obtained within 48 hours or a negative COVID-19 rapid antigen test result obtained within 24 hours before the visit. If the visitor cannot arrange the test in advance, a COVID-19 rapid antigen test must be performed and the test result must be provided right after the visit."

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

The spokesman reiterated that all visitors entering public hospitals are required to strictly comply with the infection control measures, such as wearing surgical masks, temperature checking and filling in health declaration forms. In addition, visitors need to scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code when entering public hospitals, except for exempted persons (persons who are aged below 12 or aged 65 or above, those with disabilities that render use of the app difficult and individual persons granted exemptions due to actual circumstances can complete a record form as registration).

Arrangements for children aged 5 to 11

to receive COVID-19 vaccines

The Government announced today (January 20) that children aged 5 to 11 can receive the Sinovac vaccine from tomorrow (January 21) with reservation service starting from 8am, while the reservation for BioNTech vaccination will start on February 9 and the vaccination service will commence on February 16.

"The Government attaches great importance to the vaccination of children and will provide them with special channels to receive vaccination. Under the threat posed by mutant virus strains with high transmissibility, eligible persons, both young and old, should get vaccinated as early as possible for self-protection," a Government spokesman said.

Sinovac vaccine

The Government will provide a special appointment service for schools at the Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) or the Student Health Service Centres (SHSCs) and a transport service from and to schools. Arrangements will also be made for the COVID-19 Mobile Vaccination Stations to provide the outreach Sinovac vaccination service at schools.

Schools can also liaise with the Education Bureau on arrangements for the outreach Sinovac vaccination service at schools by visiting doctors.

Starting from 8am tomorrow, parents/guardians can make reservations for children to receive the Sinovac vaccine at the CVCs or the designated general out-patient clinics of the Hospital Authority through the designated website of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk) and accompany them to receive the vaccine in person.

The Chai Wan, Lam Tin, Sha Tin, Tuen Mun and Western SHSCs of the Department of Health (www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/covid19/covid19_vaccination_in_shsc.html) will expand their Sinovac vaccination service to cover students of primary and secondary schools starting from tomorrow. Parents/guardians can call 2856 9133 during office hours for reservations.

Eligible persons can also make an appointment to receive the Sinovac vaccine through more than 1 000 private doctors or clinics that participate in the Vaccination Programme. For details, please visit: www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en/VSS.

An interval of 28 days is required for children to receive the first and the second doses of the Sinovac vaccine, which is the same for adults.

BioNTech vaccine

As the BioNTech vaccine for children requires a special dilution procedure, and in accordance with the recommendation by the Joint Scientific Committees and Expert Advisory Panel that an interval of 12 weeks is required for children to receive the first and the second doses of the BioNTech vaccine, the Government will set up three Children Community Vaccination Centers (CCVCs) on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and in the New Territories for children aged 5 to 11 to receive the vaccine.

Located in Hong Kong Children's Hospital and the multi-purpose arena on the first floor of Yuen Chau Kok Sports Centre, the CCVCs will be operated by the Hospital Authority and will come into service from February 16. The CCVC at Gleneagles Hospital will be run by the University of Hong Kong and begin its service from February 24.

Apart from the CCVCs, children aged 5 to 11 cannot receive the BioNTech vaccine at other venues.

Starting from February 9, parents/guardians can make reservations for children to receive vaccination at the CCVCs through the designated website of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

The Government will also provide a special appointment service for schools at the CCVCs and a transport service from and to schools.

The Education Bureau will issue a letter to inform schools about the arrangements for receiving the vaccines.

Points to note

Children are required to bring along a consent form signed by their parents on the date of vaccination. The consent form can be downloaded from the designated website of the Vaccination Programme (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/pdf/Consent_Form_for_COVID19_Vaccination_ENG.pdf). They must be accompanied by their parents/guardians in person when receiving vaccination.

Persons have to bring along the original identity documents on the date of vaccination. If the identity documents do not bear the photo of children such as the birth certificate, school documents (such as school handbooks) bearing a photo of the student must be presented at the time of vaccination.

The minimum age for receiving the Sinovac vaccine will be lowered to 5 from January 21. The minimum age for receiving the BioNTech vaccine will be lowered to 5 from February 26.

Members of the public can learn more relevant information by making reference to the continuous benefit-risk analysis of the authorised COVID-19 vaccines by the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/12/P2022011200679.htm) as well as an

update of the consensus interim recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in children by the scientific committees under the Centre for Health Protection (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/17/P2022011700600.htm).

Before making an appointment, please take note of a minimum interval of 14 days between COVID-19 vaccination and any other vaccination (including seasonal influenza vaccination).

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IMF commends Hong Kong's robust institutional frameworks and effective policy responses for boosting economic growth and safeguarding financial stability

Following the completion of the 2022 Article IV Consultation with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the International Monetary Fund Staff Mission (Mission) published today (January 20) its assessment in the Concluding Statement.

The Mission commends Hong Kong's strong economic recovery and the Government's efforts to safeguard financial stability. The Mission reaffirms Hong Kong's position as a major international financial centre and recognises that Hong Kong's financial sector, underpinned by robust regulatory and supervisory frameworks, has continued to expand robustly, even during the pandemic. The well-functioning Linked Exchange Rate System (LERS) remains key to safeguarding economic and financial stability. Meanwhile, Hong Kong's macroprudential policies and strong institutional frameworks have provided it with important buffers to cope with economic shocks.

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, said, "I welcome the Mission's recognition of Hong Kong's strong economic recovery supported by our swift and bold policy responses, including the electronic consumption voucher scheme and various anti-epidemic support measures. I am glad that the Mission commends our resilient financial system underpinned by robust regulatory and supervisory frameworks and ample buffers built over the years. We will continue to stay highly vigilant and monitor the economic situation closely, with a view to maintaining financial stability and fostering balanced, inclusive and sustainable growth."

The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Mr Eddie Yue, said, "I welcome the Mission's positive assessment of our regulatory and supervisory framework that it has kept pace with market developments and technological advancements. Despite the multifaceted challenges over the past few years, we have managed to maintain the stability of Hong Kong's financial system while bolstering the city as an international financial centre. As noted by the Mission, our LERS is an anchor of monetary and financial stability in Hong Kong, and it continues to demonstrate resilience and operate smoothly amidst global and market uncertainties."

The Mission notes that Hong Kong's economy has recovered strongly, supported by swift and bold policy responses. The Mission projects Hong Kong's real Gross Domestic Product growth as 6.4 per cent and 3.0 per cent in 2021 and 2022, respectively. Possible risks to growth in the short to medium term include pandemic-related uncertainties, sustained disruptions to global supply chains, an unexpected rise in global risk premia and further escalation of China-US tensions. The Mission adds that there is upside potential, such as a faster-than-expected global recovery and the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), for Hong Kong's economic growth. The development of the GBA would generate huge business opportunities and provide the best entry point for Hong Kong to integrate into the national development, thereby benefitting Hong Kong's medium- and long-term growth prospects.

The Mission commends the large fiscal stimulus that has helped mitigate the impact of economic shocks on Hong Kong. It recommends that Hong Kong's fiscal policy return to a balanced budget in a gradual manner and focus on more targeted support with a view to supporting balanced and inclusive growth and addressing structural challenges.

The Mission acknowledges that Hong Kong has made significant progress in addressing climate change in the past decade and welcomes the recently announced plan to achieve carbon neutrality before 2050 with an intermediate target to halve the 2005 level of carbon emissions before 2035. The Mission also recognises the Government's ongoing efforts to enhance the green and sustainable finance ecosystem, such as adopting internationally accepted standards and promoting eligible green and sustainable financing. In addition, the Mission views that capitalising on opportunities from the Mainland and strengthening regional and international collaboration on the green development front are conducive to consolidating Hong Kong's position as a major international financial centre.

The Mission supports the Government's three-pronged approach to containing housing market risks and increasing housing affordability (which include macroprudential measures, demand-side management measures and an increase in housing supply). The Mission comments that the current macroprudential measures for the property market should be maintained to safeguard financial stability, and the demand-side management measures have been effective in containing speculative activity and external demand. The Mission also welcomes the Government's stepped-up efforts to raise and expedite housing supply, including the multifaceted approach to providing additional public housing units in the next 10 years and the recently announced Northern Metropolis Development Strategy.

The Mission held virtual discussions with government officials, regulators and private sector representatives in Hong Kong from December 1 to 15, 2021, for the 2022 Article IV Consultation with the HKSAR. The Mission's Concluding Statement is attached in the Annex. The full report of the Article IV Consultation will be discussed by the IMF Executive Board in February 2022.

[Consumer Price Indices for December 2021](#)

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (January 20) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures for December 2021. According to the Composite CPI, overall consumer prices rose by 2.4% in December 2021 over the same month a year earlier, larger than the corresponding increase (1.8%) in November 2021. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rate of increase in the Composite CPI (i.e. the underlying inflation rate) in December 2021 was 1.4%, also larger than that in November 2021 (1.2%). The larger increase was mainly due to the enlarged increases in costs for meals out and takeaway food as well as electricity charges.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, the average monthly rate of increase in the Composite CPI for the three-month period ending December 2021 was 1.0%, and that for the three-month period ending November 2021 was 0.2%. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the corresponding rates of increase were both 0.1%.

Analysed by sub-index, the year-on-year rates of increase in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 3.0%, 2.2% and 2.0% respectively in December 2021, as compared to 2.2%, 1.7% and 1.5% respectively in November 2021. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rates of increase in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 1.5%, 1.3% and 1.4% respectively in December 2021, as compared to 1.2%, 1.1% and 1.2%

respectively in November 2021.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, for the three-month period ending December 2021, the average monthly rates of increase in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 2.5%, 0.4% and 0.1% respectively. The corresponding rates of increase for the three-month period ending November 2021 were all 0.2%. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the average monthly rates of increase in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) for the three-month period ending December 2021 were 0.1%, 0.1% and 0.0% respectively, and the corresponding rates of increase for the three-month period ending November 2021 were all 0.1%.

Amongst the various components of the Composite CPI, year-on-year increases in prices were recorded in December 2021 for electricity, gas and water (54.2%); clothing and footwear (8.7%); transport (4.1%); meals out and takeaway food (3.7%); durable goods (2.1%); basic food (1.9%); miscellaneous services (1.0%) and alcoholic drinks and tobacco (0.6%).

On the other hand, year-on-year decreases in the components of the Composite CPI were recorded in December 2021 for miscellaneous goods (-1.1%) and housing (-0.5%).

In the fourth quarter of 2021, the Composite CPI rose by 2.0% over a year earlier, while the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) rose by 2.5%, 1.8% and 1.7% respectively. The corresponding increases after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 1.2%, 1.2%, 1.1% and 1.3% respectively.

For 2021 as a whole, the Composite CPI was 1.6% higher than that in the preceding year. The respective increases in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 2.9%, 1.0% and 0.9% respectively. The corresponding increases after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 0.6%, 0.8%, 0.4% and 0.6% respectively.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that the underlying consumer price inflation rate went up to 1.4% in December 2021. Prices of meals out and takeaway food showed a widened year-on-year increase against a lower base of comparison a year earlier due to the fourth wave of local epidemic. The increase in prices of energy-related items accelerated further, and those of certain major CPI components such as clothing and footwear and transport were more visible. Nonetheless, price pressures on other major components remained moderate. For 2021 as a whole, the underlying consumer price inflation rate averaged 0.6%.

Looking ahead, external price pressures may increase further amid elevated global inflation and the pandemic-induced logistic disruptions. Yet, as the latest wave of local epidemic has weighed on some consumption-related activities and domestic cost pressures remain limited, the underlying inflation should stay broadly in check in the near term. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Further information

The CPIs and year-on-year rates of change at section level for December 2021 are shown in Table 1. The time series on the year-on-year rates of change in the CPIs before and after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures are shown in Table 2. For discerning the latest trend in consumer prices, it is also useful to look at the changes in the seasonally adjusted CPIs. The corresponding time series on the average monthly rates of change during the latest three months for the seasonally adjusted CPIs are shown in Table 3. The rates of change in the original and the seasonally adjusted Composite CPI and the underlying inflation rate are presented graphically in Chart 1.

More detailed CPI data (including year-on-year comparison, month-to-month comparison, seasonally adjusted data series and the CPIs by the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP)) are available in the monthly reports. Users can download the December 2021 issue of the "Monthly Report on the Consumer Price Index" (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1060001&scode=270), the time series of CPIs at detailed level (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=D5600001&scode=270), the time series of CPIs at COICOP division level (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=D5600002&scode=270) and the time series of CPIs after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=D5600003&scode=270) at the website of the C&SD.

The new 2019/20-based CPI series, as was first announced by the C&SD on May 28, 2021, is compiled on the basis of the expenditure patterns obtained from the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) conducted during October 2019 to September 2020. It replaces the old 2014/15-based series for analysing consumer price changes. After the reference month of December 2021 (i.e. the current month), the old 2014/15-based CPI series will cease to be compiled. It is an established practice in Hong Kong for the HES to be conducted and for the CPI series to be rebased once every five years. Both the old and the new series of CPIs have been exhibiting a similar trend in recent months.

For enquiries about the CPIs, please contact the Consumer Price Index Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7374 or email: cpi@censtatd.gov.hk).