

# Hong Kong Monetary Authority welcomes pilot launch of Shenzhen-Hong Kong cross-boundary data validation platform

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Shenzhen and Hong Kong authorities announced today (May 6) the pilot launch of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong cross-boundary data validation platform. The platform utilises blockchain technology and data coding (i.e. hash values) for document verification without involving any cross-boundary transfer or storage of the original documents. The platform provides a credible means for validating the authenticity of the documents presented by the data owners.

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) has been working closely with Mainland authorities in facilitating the development of fintech innovation and cross-boundary data flow in both Guangdong and Hong Kong. All stakeholders are supportive of fintech adoption by financial institutions to promote cross-boundary data usage in an orderly and secure manner and in compliance with relevant regulatory requirements.

In recent months, the HKMA co-ordinated and facilitated the development and testing of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong cross-boundary data validation platform (Note) together with the Shenzhen Municipal Cyberspace Administration, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government, Shenzhen Municipal Financial Regulatory Bureau, the Authority of Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone of Shenzhen Municipality, the Shenzhen Branch of the People's Bank of China, the Shenzhen Regulatory Bureau of National Financial Regulatory Administration.

During the first phase of implementation of the platform, pilot trials will be conducted with cross-boundary use cases in the financial sector, covering validation of credit referencing reports as well as account opening documents for corporate customers.

The HKMA will continue to work closely with the Mainland authorities, facilitating more banks to conduct pilot trials involving cross-boundary data validation in Shenzhen and Hong Kong, and enhancing industry engagement through the HKMA's Fintech Supervisory Sandbox, with a view to promoting safe cross-boundary data flow, and enhancing banks' operational efficiency and risk management.

Note: The platform is operated by China (Qianhai) Internet Exchange, Shenzhen Smart City and the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation in Shenzhen and Hong Kong respectively, while WeBank Co., Ltd. provides research and technical support.

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## CHP investigates case of suspected neurotoxic shellfish poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (May 6) investigating a case of suspected neurotoxic shellfish poisoning affecting a 31-year-old man.

The patient presented with vomiting, dizziness, blurred vision, generalised weakness and four limbs rigidity about 45 minutes after consuming sea snails and areolate babylon at home yesterday (May 5). He attended the Accident and Emergency Department of United Christian Hospital on the same day and did not require hospitalisation. He has been in stable condition all along.

An initial investigation revealed that the sea snails and areolate babylon were bought from a seafood stall at Po Tat Market in Kwun Tong. An investigation by the CHP is continuing.

"Neurotoxic shellfish poisoning toxin is a natural toxin sometimes found in bivalve shellfish. It is heat-stable and cannot be destroyed through cooking," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"The neurotoxic shellfish poisoning symptoms include tingling of the lips, mouth and tongue, as well as gastrointestinal upset such as diarrhoea and vomiting. The onset is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after ingestion of the shellfish," the spokesman added.

The spokesman reminded members of the public that they should seek medical advice immediately if they develop neurotoxic shellfish poisoning symptoms, and save any leftovers for investigation and laboratory testing.

To reduce the risk of shellfish poisoning, the public should:

- Buy shellfish from reliable and licensed seafood shops;
  - Remove the viscera, gonads and roe before cooking and discard any cooking liquid before consumption;
  - Eat a smaller amount of shellfish in any one meal; and
  - When symptoms occur after consuming shellfish, seek medical advice immediately.
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# Update on cases of Legionnaires' disease

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 6) reported the latest number of cases of Legionnaires' disease (LD), and stressed the importance of using and maintaining properly designed man-made water systems, adding that susceptible groups should strictly observe relevant precautions.

From April 28 to May 4, the CHP recorded three community-acquired LD cases:

1. A male patient, aged 75 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Tuen Mun District;
2. A male patient, aged 69 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Tuen Mun District; and
3. A female patient, aged 75 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Kowloon City District.

"Epidemiological investigations are ongoing to identify potential sources of infection, high-risk exposure and clusters, if any," a spokesman for the CHP said.

As of May 4, 30 LD cases had been recorded this year. In 2023 and 2022, there were 121 and 80 cases respectively.

"Men, people aged over 50, smokers, alcoholics and persons with weakened immunity are more susceptible to LD. Some situations may also increase the risk of infection, including poor maintenance of water systems; living in areas with old water systems, cooling towers or fountains; using electric water heaters, whirlpools and spas or hot water spring spas; and recent stays in hotels or vessels," the spokesman said.

Legionellae are found in various environmental settings and grow well in warm water (20 to 45 degrees Celsius). They can be found in aqueous environments such as water tanks, hot and cold water systems, cooling towers, whirlpools and spas, water fountains and home apparatus that support breathing. People may become infected when they breathe in contaminated droplets (aerosols) and mist generated by artificial water systems, or when handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes.

Immunocompromised persons should:

- Use sterile or boiled water for drinking, tooth brushing and mouth rinsing;
- Avoid using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices; and

- If using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices, fill the water tank with only sterile or cooled freshly boiled water, and not water directly from the tap. Also, clean and maintain humidifiers/devices regularly according to manufacturers' instructions. Never leave stagnant water in a humidifier/device. Empty the water tank, wipe all surfaces dry, and change the water daily.

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â€‹The public should observe the health advice below:

- Observe personal hygiene;
- Do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption;
- Strainers in water taps and shower heads should be inspected, cleaned, descaled and disinfected regularly or at a frequency recommended by the manufacturer;
- If a fresh-water plumbing system is properly maintained, it is not necessary to install domestic water filters. Use of water filters is not encouraged as clogging occurs easily, which can promote growth of micro-organisms. In case water filters are used, the pore size should be 0.2 micrometres ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) and the filter needs to be changed periodically according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Drain and clean water tanks of buildings at least quarterly;
- Drain or purge for at least one minute infrequently used water outlets (e.g. water taps, shower heads and hot water outlets) and stagnant points of the pipework weekly or before use;
- Seek and follow doctors' professional advice regarding the use and maintenance of home respiratory devices and use only sterile water (not distilled or tap water) to clean and fill the reservoir. Clean and maintain the device regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions. After cleaning/disinfection, rinse the device with sterile water, cooled freshly boiled water or water filtered with 0.2  $\mu\text{m}$  filters. Never leave stagnant water in the device. Empty the water tank, keep all surfaces dry, and change the water daily; and
- When handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes:
  1. Wear gloves and a face mask;
  2. Water gardens and compost gently using low pressure;
  3. Open composted potting mixes slowly and make sure the opening is directed away from the face;
  4. Wet the soil to reduce dust when potting plants; and
  5. Avoid working in poorly ventilated places such as enclosed greenhouses.

â€‹â€‹The public may visit the CHP's [LD page](#), the [Code of Practice for Prevention of LD](#) and the [Housekeeping Guidelines for Cold and Hot Water Systems for Building Management](#) of the Prevention of LD Committee, and the CHP's [risk-based strategy](#) for prevention and control of LD.

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# Provisional statistics of restaurant receipts and purchases for first quarter of 2024

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest provisional figures on restaurant receipts and purchases today (May 6).

The value of total receipts of the restaurants sector in the first quarter of 2024, provisionally estimated at \$28.2 billion, increased by 2.3% over a year earlier. Over the same period, the provisional estimate of the value of total purchases by restaurants decreased by 0.3% to \$9.0 billion.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total restaurant receipts decreased by 0.7% in the first quarter of 2024 compared with a year earlier.

Analysed by type of restaurant and comparing the first quarter of 2024 with the first quarter of 2023, total receipts of Chinese restaurants increased by 1.3% in value, but decreased by 1.8% in volume. Total receipts of non-Chinese restaurants increased by 1.0% in value, but decreased by 1.5% in volume. Total receipts of fast food shops increased by 5.8% in value and 2.2% in volume. Total receipts of bars decreased by 17.8% in value and 19.7% in volume. As for miscellaneous eating and drinking places, total receipts increased by 6.9% in value and 3.0% in volume.

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of total restaurant receipts decreased by 1.8% in value and 2.4% in volume in the first quarter of 2024 compared with the preceding quarter.

To facilitate further understanding of the short-term business performance of the restaurants sector, statistics in respect of the restaurant receipts and purchases in individual months of the reference quarter are also compiled.

Analysed by month, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total receipts of the restaurants sector decreased by 0.3%, increased by 8.1% and decreased by 0.3% respectively in January, February and March 2024, compared with the corresponding months in 2023.

After discounting the effect of price changes, it was provisionally estimated that the volume of total restaurant receipts decreased by 3.1%, increased by 4.6% and decreased by 3.3% respectively in January, February and March 2024, compared with the corresponding months in 2023.

## Commentary

A Government spokesman said that business of restaurants saw decelerated

growth in the first quarter of 2024 after a sharp rebound in the past year. The value of total restaurant receipts increased by 2.3% over a year ago.

Looking ahead, business of restaurants should continue to be supported by the Government's measures in boosting confidence, as well as the revival of inbound tourism and increase in employment income. Yet, the changing consumption patterns of visitors and residents may pose challenges.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures of restaurant receipts by type of restaurant and total purchases by the restaurants sector for the fourth quarter of 2023 as well as the provisional figures for the first quarter of 2024.

Table 2 and Table 3 present the revised value and volume indices respectively of restaurant receipts by type of restaurant for the fourth quarter of 2023 and the provisional indices for the first quarter of 2024.

Table 4 presents the year-on-year rate of change in total restaurant receipts in value and volume terms based on the original quarterly series, as well as the quarter-to-quarter rate of change based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The revised figures on restaurant receipts and purchases for the first quarter of 2024 (with breakdown by month) will be released through the website of C&SD ([www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode540.html](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode540.html)) and relevant publications of the Department from June 20, 2024.

The classification of restaurants follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Quarterly Survey of Restaurant Receipts and Purchases". Users can browse and download the publication at the website of the C&SD ([www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080002&scode=540](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080002&scode=540)).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of C&SD (Tel: 3903 7401; email: [qsr@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:qsr@censtatd.gov.hk)).

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## **[Survey on Small and Medium-Sized](#)**

# Enterprises' Credit Conditions for first quarter of 2024

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (May 6) the results of Survey on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)' Credit Conditions for the first quarter of 2024. According to the survey, SMEs' credit conditions show signs of improvement.

Regarding SMEs' perception of banks' credit approval stance relative to six months ago, excluding respondents who answered "no idea/don't know", 71 per cent perceived a "similar" or "easier" credit approval stance in the first quarter of 2024, up from 69 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 1 in the Annex). 29 per cent perceived a "more difficult" credit approval stance, down from 31 per cent in the previous quarter. The perception of a more difficult credit approval stance may not necessarily reflect actual difficulties faced by SMEs in obtaining bank credit as the perception could be affected by a number of factors, such as media/news reports, business conditions and opinions of relatives and friends.

Among respondents with existing credit lines, 12 per cent reported a "tighter" banks' stance, significantly down from 24 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 2 in the Annex). In this survey, a tighter stance on existing credit lines denotes a range of possible measures or arrangements, such as reducing unused and used credit lines, raising the interest rate, imposing additional collateral requirements, or shortening loan tenor. Therefore, respondents' indication of banks' stance on existing credit lines may not directly reflect banks' supply of credit to SMEs.

The survey also gauged the results of new credit applications from SMEs. 3 per cent of the respondents reported that they had applied for new bank credit during the first quarter of 2024. Among the respondents who had already known their application outcomes, 86 per cent reported fully or partially successful applications, up from 80 per cent in the previous quarter (Chart 3 in the Annex). 14 per cent reported unsuccessful applications, down from 20 per cent in the previous quarter.

Owing to small sample sizes of SMEs with existing credit lines (18 per cent of surveyed SMEs) and with new credit applications (3 per cent of surveyed SMEs) during the quarter, the results could be prone to large fluctuations, and hence should be interpreted with care.

## About Survey on SMEs' Credit Conditions

In light of the importance of SMEs to the Hong Kong economy and concerns about potential funding difficulties facing SMEs over the past few years, the HKMA has appointed the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) to carry out this survey, starting from the third quarter of 2016. This survey is

conducted on a quarterly basis, covering about 2 500 SMEs from different economic sectors each time. The results of this survey can help monitor the development of SMEs' access to bank credit from a demand-side perspective.

The results of this survey should be interpreted with caution. Similar to other opinion surveys, views collected in this survey may be affected by changes in sentiment due to idiosyncratic events that occurred over the survey period, which can make the results prone to fluctuations. Readers are advised to interpret the results together with other economic and financial information. In addition, views collected are limited to the expected direction of inter-quarter changes (e.g. "tighter", "no change" or "easier") without providing information about the magnitude of these changes.

Detailed tables and technical information of this survey are published on the website of the HKPC ([smecc.hkpc.org](http://smecc.hkpc.org)).