

CHP investigates outbreak of acute gastroenteritis at kindergarten-cum-child care centre in Tsing Yi

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 11) investigating an outbreak of acute gastroenteritis (AGE) at a kindergarten-cum-child care centre in Tsing Yi, and hence reminded the public and management of institutions to maintain personal and environmental hygiene against AGE.

The outbreak involves 10 boys and eight girls aged 2 to 3 years, as well as two female staff members. They developed vomiting and diarrhoea since December 4. Fourteen of them sought medical attention. Among them, one required hospitalisation. Upon laboratory testing, the stool specimen of one staff member tested positive for norovirus. All patients are in stable condition.

Officers of the CHP have conducted a site visit and provided health advice to the staff of the school concerning proper and thorough disinfection, proper disposal of vomitus, and personal and environmental hygiene. The school has been put under medical surveillance.

The CHP's investigations are ongoing.

A spokesman for the CHP advised members of the public to take heed of the following preventive measures against gastroenteritis:

- Ensure proper personal hygiene;
- Wash hands thoroughly before handling food and eating, after using the toilet or after changing diapers;
- Wear gloves when disposing of vomitus or faecal matter, and wash hands afterwards;
- Clean and disinfect contaminated areas or items promptly and thoroughly with diluted household bleach (by adding one part of bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water). Wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Pay attention to food hygiene;
- Use separate utensils to handle raw and cooked food;
- Avoid food that is not thoroughly cooked;
- Drink boiled water; and
- Do not patronise unlicensed food premises or food stalls.

The public may visit the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk) or call the Health Education Hotline (2833 0111) for more information.

LCQ14: Police's requests for removing postings on social platforms

Following is a question by the Hon Hui Chi-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

It has been reported that in October this year, the Police issued letters to the operator of a social platform on two occasions, requesting that certain postings on its platform be removed on the grounds that such postings had violated the community standards of the platform concerned as they contained false news or hate speeches. Regarding the Police's requests for removing postings on social platforms, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the legal basis for the Police's making the aforesaid requests for removing postings; whether the Police sought the views of the Department of Justice and the relevant government departments prior to making such requests;

(2) whether it has assessed if the Police, by making the requests for removing postings, infringed upon the freedom of speech and freedom of communication enjoyed by Hong Kong residents under the Basic Law;

(3) of the criteria adopted by the Police for determining (i) whether a particular posting is related to police duties, and (ii) whether a request for removing a posting or revision of its contents should be made;

(4) whether it has monitored the postings on the various social platforms at present; if so, of the name(s) of the government department(s) responsible and the details of the relevant work; and

(5) of the respective numbers of occasions, in each of the past three years, on which the Police and other government departments requested the operators of social platforms and websites to (i) remove postings and (ii) revise the contents of postings (including news reports), as well as the respective numbers of requests which were complied with?

Reply:

President,

According to the information provided by relevant bureaux and departments, our reply is as follows:

(1) and (3) The Internet is not a virtual world that is beyond the law. According to the existing legislation in Hong Kong, most of the crime-prevention laws in the real world are applicable to the Internet world. It is the statutory duty of police officers to maintain public safety and public order, as well as safeguard people's life and property. In the course of carrying out their duties, the Police will request information or co-operation from relevant persons or organisations (including information and communications technology companies), including requesting Internet platforms to remove postings. In doing so, the Police will make the requests in accordance with the laws, procedures or guidelines related to their duties, and such requests would only be made when necessary for performing their duties.

The circumstances of each case are unique. The Police will not comment on individual cases.

(2) Hong Kong residents enjoy freedom of speech as stipulated in the Basic Law, but such freedom is not absolute. According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as applied to Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance (Cap. 383), the exercise by anyone of the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities, and may therefore be subject to certain restrictions as provided for by law as necessary for (i) respecting the rights or reputations of others, or (ii) protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals. Any person exercising the abovementioned rights should respect the rights of others, and should not compromise public order and public safety while doing so.

The Police all along respect the public's freedoms of expression and speech. However, when the speech may be in violation of the law, such as speech that constitutes criminal intimidation, the Police have to conduct follow-up investigation based on the circumstances and complaints so as to maintain law and order and public safety. Based on the circumstances and evidence of each case, the Police will conduct investigation in a fair and just manner and take appropriate actions, including requesting Internet platforms to remove postings. The Police will take strict enforcement actions against illegal activities by any person in a fair and impartial manner.

Over the past few months, a lot of false information has been circulated online and in the social media, especially a vast amount of fake news and baseless accusations that targeted the Police. Most of these unsubstantiated messages twist the facts, create panic in the community, deepen confrontation and division in society, and disrupt police-community relations. The Government strongly condemn the wilful spread of these rumours online, and will endeavour to provide the relevant facts and information to dispel the false information. The Government call on the public to remain objective and rational, and not to hastily believe in fabricated online rumours.

(4) The Internet (including social media) is a public platform filled with a

huge amount of information. As some people use it as a medium and tool for committing crimes, the Police have the responsibility to combat such crimes and curb the public's contact with these criminal acts.

The Police conduct "cyber patrol" as necessary for the purpose of crime prevention and detection, that is, to search for relevant information via public platforms on the Internet. The Police will also, according to operational priorities, conduct targeted searches professionally on such platforms for pertinent criminal information (e.g. fraudulent bank websites, illegal football betting activities, dissemination of child pornography, trafficking of dangerous drugs, online criminal libel, etc.)

The Police will continue to closely monitor potential criminal activities online and take enforcement action. The Government will take stringent follow-up actions against any illegal or violent acts, or acts that prejudice public safety or public order.

(5) The numbers of occasions on which individual government departments requested the operators of social platforms and websites to remove postings and revise the contents of postings (including news reports) from 2017 to 2019, as well as the numbers of requests which were complied with, are set out at Appendix.

LCQ8: Arrangement of police officers' overtime work

Following is a question by the Hon Jeremy Tam and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

According to the Guidelines on Control and Administration of Overtime issued by the Civil Service Bureau in 2000, civil servants may undertake overtime (OT) work only when it is strictly unavoidable, and each officer may work OT for a maximum of 60 hours only in a month. In addition, time-off should be the normal recompense for OT work. However, when it is, or is likely to be, impractical for the department to arrange time-off for the officer concerned within one month from the date when OT work is performed, the department may grant him Overtime Allowance (OTA). It has been reported that since the eruption of the "anti-extradition to China" movement in June this year, police officers have been granted substantial amounts of OTA and the ceiling on the OT hours for which they may work has been raised to 120 hours in a month. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of a breakdown of the number of police officers who were engaged in crowd management work from June to November this year by number of OT hours they claimed each month (set out in Table 1);

Table 1

Number of OT hours	Number of persons					
	June	July	August	September	October	November
1-20						
21-40						
41-60						
61-80						
81-100						
101-119						
120						

(2) regarding police officers engaged in crowd management work from June to November this year who belonged to (i) a rank below Chief Inspector of Police and (ii) the rank of Chief Inspector of Police, of the respective total amounts of OTA they received and the respective numbers of persons receiving OTA each month, with a breakdown of such numbers of persons by the group to which the amount of allowance received per person belonged (each group spanning \$10 000) in tables of the same format as Table 2;

Table 2

Rank: _____

OTA (\$)	Number of persons					
	June	July	August	September	October	November
1-10 000						
10 001-20 000						
...						

(3) whether police officers engaged in crowd management work who belong to the rank of (i) Superintendent of Police or (ii) Directorate Officers of the Police Force are eligible for OTA; if so, of the respective total amounts of OTA they received and the respective numbers of persons receiving OTA each month from June to November this year, with a breakdown of the numbers of persons by the group to which the amount of allowance received per person belonged (each group spanning \$10 000) in tables of the same format as Table 2;

(4) of the total amount of OTA granted to police officers from June to November this year;

(5) how the mechanisms for the application for and the vetting and approval of OTA for police officers operate; of the measures in place to guard against false claims of OT work, and to ascertain that the relevant work is "strictly unavoidable"; and

(6) of the objective factors based on which (i) it determines whether it is practical to arrange time-off for the police officers who have performed OT work within the following month, and (ii) it made the decision to raise the ceiling for the OT hours that police officers may work to 120 hours in a month?

Reply:

President,

Since early June this year, more than 900 protests, processions and public meetings have been staged in Hong Kong, many of which eventually turned into illegal acts of violence. Such violent acts include wantonly blocking roads, paralysing traffic, hurling petrol bombs and bricks at various locations, setting fires, intentionally vandalising and burning shops and MTR and Light Rail facilities, and madly assaulting people with different views. These acts have seriously jeopardised public safety and public order. In performing their duties to maintain public safety and public order, police officers have faced serious threats to their personal safety.

The Police have a statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order. When unlawful acts take place, the Police must take appropriate enforcement actions to maintain public order, and safeguard the lives and properties of the public.

Frontline police officers have remained steadfast in their duties during the ongoing conflicts in the past few months. While handling massive and unlawful violent acts in various districts, they have also maintained regular police duties and public services in the territory. The Police have flexibly deployed internal manpower and resources to cope with operational needs in a timely manner.

Having consulted the Civil Service Bureau, we provide a consolidated reply to the Hon Jeremy Tam's question below:

(1) to (4) In the demonstrations over the past months, processions and public meetings turned into illegal acts of violence. Overtime (OT) work of police officers may only be undertaken when it is strictly unavoidable, and is subject to the Civil Service Regulations (CSR) as well as the stringent control under the relevant internal regulations of the Police. According to CSR, OT work will normally be compensated by time off in lieu. Where the granting of time off is, or is likely to be, impracticable within 30 days of the date on which OT work is performed, payment of Disciplined Services Overtime Allowance to eligible officers may be approved. According to the existing CSR, only those in ranks whose scale maxima are on or below Point 48 of the Police Pay Scale (i.e. the maximum pay point of Chief Inspector of

Police) are eligible for Disciplined Services Overtime Allowance.

The Police will, having regard to operational needs, deploy manpower as appropriate, and permit officers to take time off or receive OT allowance according to individual needs and work situation.

In 2019-20, a provision of around \$20.2 billion was made under Subhead 000 Operational expenses for salaries, allowances and other operating expenses of the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF). In accordance with the established practice, the amount of OT allowance paid by HKPF in the 2019-20 financial year will be reflected in the relevant revised estimate.

(5) and (6) OT work arrangement and compensation of police officers are regulated by relevant provisions of CSR and Civil Service Bureau Circular No. 18/2000 (the Circular). HKPF has put in place stringent control and approval procedures over OT work. Supervisors will follow the requirements of relevant internal orders and criteria in considering OT work applications.

Under CSR, Heads of Departments should set a ceiling for the OT hours which an officer may undertake within a month. The ceiling is normally set at 60 hours in a month. The Circular also stipulates that departments have the flexibility to require officers to work OT which will exceed the above ceiling in exceptional or emergency situations or circumstances of genuine need.

In view of the prevailing operational needs, HKPF has adjusted the ceiling for the OT hours which the police officer concerned may undertake within a month according to the established procedures of the Circular.

[LCQ22: Innovation and Technology Fund for Better Living](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

The Innovation and Technology Bureau launched the \$500 million Innovation and Technology Fund for Better Living (ITFBL) on May 31, 2017 to encourage and fund the use of innovation and technology (I&T) by the various sectors in the community in developing I&T application projects that bring more convenience, comfort and safety to the daily living of members of the public, or address the needs of specific community groups. It has been reported that up to September this year, the authorities processed a total of

86 applications for ITFBL and approved only 25 of them, representing a success rate of mere 29 per cent. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of enquiries on ITFBL received by the authorities so far; the content and category of the I&T projects involved in the various enquiries and applications;

(2) of the following information on the ITFBL applications for which funding has been granted: (i) the total amount of grant and the average amount of grant for each application, (ii) the average time taken for vetting and approval of each application, (iii) the target beneficiary group(s) of each application and the number of people expected to benefit, and (iv) the number of applications that are also granted funding by the Public Sector Trial Scheme under the Innovation and Technology Fund;

(3) whether it has conducted studies on the major factors accounting for the low success rate of ITFBL applications;

(4) whether the authorities will (i) enhance or adjust the mode of operation, eligibility criteria for application, scope of coverage, etc of ITFBL, and (ii) review annually the implementation of ITFBL; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) whether the authorities will draw up performance indicators for assessing the effectiveness of ITFBL in promoting digital inclusion; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) given that ITFBL generally only accepts applications from the following categories of organisations: non-governmental organisations subvented by the Social Welfare Department, public bodies, professional bodies, trade associations and social service organisations exempted from tax, whether the authorities will consider relaxing the coverage of the organisations eligible for application; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Innovation and Technology Bureau (ITB) launched the Innovation and Technology Fund for Better Living (FBL) on May 31, 2017 to encourage different organisations to transform innovative ideas into deliverables that can benefit society, thereby promoting an innovation and technology (I&T) culture and improving people's quality of living.

Our reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) As at end November 2019, the FBL Secretariat (the Secretariat) has received a total of more than 300 written and 1 400 telephone enquiries which are mainly related to eligibility criteria, application procedures and assessment criteria.

Over the same period, the Secretariat has received a total of 112

applications covering various themes, including daily living, education, health, safety, mobility, etc. The project deliverables are mainly in the form of mobile applications, services, products and software, etc.

(2) So far, 25 applications have been approved. The total grant exceeded \$83 million, with an average of about \$3.35 million for each project. It took an average of about 14 weeks for the Secretariat to process an application. The actual time required for processing each application depends on the complexity of the project and the completeness of the information and documents submitted by the applicant. The target beneficiary groups and estimated number of beneficiaries of each approved project are at Annex.

The FBL funding generally covers the expenditure for the implementation and application of the project deliverables in the target groups for a period of two years. Therefore, there is no need for successful applicants to apply for funding from the Public Sector Trial Scheme.

(3) A project is required to meet the various assessment criteria of the FBL, including benefits to be brought to the target groups, I&T content, feasibility and sustainability, etc so as to ensure the proper use of public funds. Some unsuccessful applications were due to insignificant benefits to be brought or inadequate I&T content. We shall enhance information dissemination and publicity so as to let the applicants have a better understanding of the requirements of the FBL.

(4) & (6) The Secretariat conducted a comprehensive review in the first half of 2019 on different aspects of the FBL, including eligibility criteria, application procedures, assessment mechanism, level of funding, implementation and monitoring of projects, etc. After consulting the FBL Assessment Panel, enhancement measures were introduced in August 2019. These include extending the eligibility criteria to cover social service organisations exempted from tax under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap 112) to encourage more organisations to submit applications, and simplifying the requirement on progress reports to ease the administrative burden of funded organisations.

On the other hand, in order to provide clearer information to applicants, the Secretariat has amended certain parts of the application form, application guide and fund agreement so that applicants can have a better understanding of the requirements regarding the submission of information, the items covered by the project expenditure, the provisions in the fund agreement, etc.

(5) The FBL aims at bringing more convenience, comfort and safety to people's daily living, or addressing the needs of specific community groups. Applicants need to set out the performance indicators, including the target number of beneficiaries, number of downloads (if the project is a mobile application), implementation timetable, etc. The Secretariat will assess and monitor each project in accordance with the relevant indicators.

LCQ7: Pneumococcal vaccination

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Kwok Ka-ki and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

The Government has been providing, under the Government Vaccination Programme and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, free or subsidised administration of 23 valent pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine to elderly persons since 2009, and free administration of 13-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13) to elderly persons "with high-risk conditions" (e.g. suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, liver or kidney diseases) since 2017. However, pneumonia was ranked the second killer disease in Hong Kong for seven consecutive years from 2012 to 2018, and the number of deaths caused by pneumonia even hit a record high of 8 437 in 2018. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of deaths, from January to November this year, of elderly persons aged 65 or above caused by complications of pneumonia after the infection of influenza and, among such cases, the number of those in which the elderly persons concerned had not received any pneumococcal vaccination;

(2) of the uptake rate of free PCV13 among elderly persons "with high-risk conditions", and the respective uptake rates of elderly persons suffering from various chronic diseases, in each year from 2017 to 2019 (up to November); and

(3) as the number of deaths caused by pneumonia has remained persistently high, of the authorities' new measures to tackle the high number of deaths caused by pneumonia, and whether they will consider providing all elderly persons aged 65 or above with free administration of PCV13, which has a higher efficacy?

Reply:

President,

Pneumonia can be caused by various pathogens (including bacteria, viruses and fungi), for example influenza virus, parainfluenza virus, adenovirus, respiratory syncytial virus, human metapneumovirus, rhinovirus, pneumococcus, *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* and *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, etc. There were some 8 000 deaths caused by pneumonia in 2018, including cases caused by various pathogens. In general, pathogens that can cause pneumonia spread mainly through droplets from coughing or sneezing of infected persons, or direct contact with the patients' respiratory secretions. Maintaining

good personal hygiene (including performing hand hygiene frequently) and environmental hygiene at all times is an effective way to prevent infection.

Pneumococcal vaccination is another safe and effective means to prevent pneumococcal infection, whereas influenza vaccination can lower the risk of influenza complications (including pneumonia), hospitalisation and mortality among elders. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) has been closely monitoring and examining the latest scientific evidence, recommendations of the World Health Organization, experiences from overseas health authorities and local epidemiological data, with a view to reviewing the recommendations on the use of vaccines. In consultation with the DH, the reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) As at November 27, 2019, the CHP recorded a total of 437 deaths involving persons aged 65 or above with laboratory confirmation of influenza. The causes of death in these cases could be pneumonia, other acute medical conditions/complications or underlying chronic diseases. The CHP does not maintain statistics on deaths caused by complications of pneumonia. According to the CHP, among these cases, 217 persons had no records of pneumococcal vaccination under the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP) or the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS).

(2) Since 2009, the Government has been providing, under the GVP (including Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme) and the VSS, one dose of free or subsidised 23-valent pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (23vPPV) for each eligible elder aged 65 or above who has never received pneumococcal vaccination before. By making reference to the SCVPD's recommendations in July 2016, the CHP also started to provide an additional dose of free or subsidised 13-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13) for elders aged 65 or above with high-risk conditions (Note) since October 2017 to enhance their protection against pneumococcal infection. Eligible elders may receive one dose of PCV13, followed by another dose of 23vPPV one year after. For eligible elders who have already received one dose of 23vPPV, they may receive a mop-up dose of PCV13 one year after. For those without high-risk conditions and who have never received pneumococcal vaccination before, the SCVPD recommends that they should receive either one dose of PCV13 or one dose of 23vPPV.

Since the implementation of the vaccination scheme in 2009 (as at December 1, 2019), some 440 000 and 280 000 elders (including those with high-risk conditions such as diabetes mellitus) received 23vPPV and PCV13 respectively.

The DH does not keep breakdown by chronic diseases among elders who have received pneumococcal vaccination. The overall number of elders who have received pneumococcal vaccination and their uptake rates from 2017 to 2019 are detailed in Annex.

(3) Since various vaccination schemes have been launched by the Government since 2009 to provide free or subsidised 23vPPV for elders aged 65 or above,

the arrangement is in line with the SCVPD's latest recommendations.

The SCVPD is responsible for reviewing and formulating public health strategies for the prevention and control of vaccine-preventable diseases in the light of changing epidemiology and advances in medical science. On pneumococcal vaccines, the SCVPD and its Working Group on Pneumococcal Vaccination review the local epidemiology and scientific evidence on a regular basis and put forward recommendations on pneumococcal vaccination. According to the recommendations announced by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States in November 2019, all persons aged 65 or above should receive one dose of 23vPPV, and those aged 65 or above without high risk factors generally need not receive an additional dose of PCV13. For persons aged 65 or above without immunocompromised conditions, cerebrospinal fluid leak or cochlear implant and who have never received PCV13 before, whether there is a need for them to receive an additional dose of PCV13 depends on shared clinical decisions. The SCVPD will hold meetings on a timely basis to examine overseas health authorities' recommendations on pneumococcal vaccination for elders and the latest scientific evidence. The Government will also review the coverage of the pneumococcal vaccination schemes for elders in Hong Kong, having regard to the SCVPD's recommendations and other public health considerations.

The CHP disseminates health messages through various means on the prevention of communicable diseases and maintenance of personal and environmental hygiene to the public and stakeholders. It also encourages elders through these messages to receive pneumococcal and influenza vaccination. The DH has also organised a number of briefing sessions for healthcare personnel, residential care homes, elderly centres and relevant organisations to promote the importance of vaccination and explain to them the detailed arrangements of the vaccination schemes.

Note:

Under the GVP 2019/20, persons with high-risk conditions set out below are eligible for receiving pneumococcal vaccination:

- (a) history of invasive pneumococcal disease, cerebrospinal fluid leakage or cochlear implant;
- (b) chronic cardiovascular (except hypertension without complications), lung, liver or kidney diseases;
- (c) metabolic diseases including diabetes mellitus or obesity (Body Mass Index 30 or above);
- (d) immunocompromised states related to weakened immune system (due to conditions such as asplenia, Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or cancer/steroid treatment); and
- (e) chronic neurological conditions that can compromise respiratory functions or the handling of respiratory secretions, increase the risk of aspiration or result in a lack of self-care ability.