

Grave sweepers urged to stagger grave-sweeping activities over wider period before and after Ching Ming Festival

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (March 15) appealed to members of the public to stagger grave-sweeping activities over a wider period before and after the Ching Ming Festival (April 5), to avoid grave sweeping during the peak period on the day of the Ching Ming Festival so as to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The opening hours of public columbaria under the FEHD will be extended to 7am to 7pm during the Ching Ming Festival period (i.e. from March 19 to April 18) to lessen crowd conditions. Grave sweepers visiting cemeteries and columbaria should avoid meal gatherings at worship sites or in crowded places. They are also urged to maintain appropriate social distancing with other people as far as possible, comply with relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease in relation to restrictions on group gatherings and requirements on mask wearing, etc, maintain good personal hygiene and keep the environment clean when sweeping graves. The FEHD will also step up cleaning services inside public cemeteries and columbaria."

The spokesman reminded grave sweepers to pay attention to special traffic and transport arrangements which will be implemented during the Ching Ming Festival. Access to cemeteries and columbaria of the FEHD will be closed to all vehicles while the special traffic and transport arrangements are in operation, except for those with permission. For details of the special traffic and transport arrangements in the vicinity of cemeteries and crematoria, please visit the Transport Department website (www.td.gov.hk).

The spokesman added that a section of Nim Wan Road to Tsang Tsui Columbarium will be closed on Saturdays, Sundays and the public holiday during the Ching Ming Festival period (i.e. from March 19 to April 18). Grave sweepers are not allowed to walk or drive to the Columbarium. The public can take the MTR Bus Route K52A (Tuen Mun Station – Tsang Tsui Columbarium) to the Columbarium. For details, please refer to the announcements from the MTR Corporation Limited.

Separately, the spokesman called on grave sweepers to co-operate by clearing stagnant water and rubbish before leaving, to prevent mosquito breeding. Containers such as lunch boxes, drink cans, plastic bags and buckets for burning incense should also be removed. As a precaution against mosquitoes, grave sweepers are advised to wear light-coloured long-sleeved tops and trousers, and apply insect repellent to exposed parts of their body. The FEHD has also advised managers of private cemeteries to take similar precautions against mosquitoes.

To protect the environment and to prevent hill fires, members of the public are encouraged to replace incense burning with flowers when paying tribute to their ancestors. Grave sweepers should take extra care when burning incense, which should only be carried out inside a designated joss paper furnace or iron bucket. They should make sure that all fires have gone out before leaving. Grave sweepers are also reminded to keep flammable items (such as alcohol antiseptic sprays and alcohol-based instant hand sanitisers) away from fires.

The Government has been promoting green burials, and the FEHD has set up the Internet Memorial Service webpage (www.memorial.gov.hk) and its mobile application for members of the public to pay tribute to their deceased beloved ones anywhere and anytime.