

HA activates service demand surge measures

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) announced today (December 20) that the HA will activate service demand surge special measures tomorrow (December 21). In view of the cold weather and the upcoming Christmas and New Year holidays, the HA anticipates an increase in service demand at public hospitals and will closely monitor hospital operations.

The HA Chief Manager (Cluster Performance), Dr Larry Lee, said, "Public hospitals will implement special measures to cope with increasing service demand for Accident & Emergency (A&E) Departments and inpatient services, including enhanced manpower, bed capacity, and laboratory testing services for influenza and other viruses. Hospital command centres will co-ordinate discharge procedures and support arrangements for admission, discharge and transfer to ensure that patients receive timely and appropriate treatment and that beds are available for new admissions. Meanwhile, Community Geriatric Assessment Teams will strengthen support for residential care homes for the elderly, such as increasing visits, to reduce pressure on A&E attendance and unnecessary hospitalisation."

Dr Lee noted that understanding the high demand for medical services during the Christmas and New Year holidays, the HA will enhance General Out-patient Clinic (GOPC) services. The HA urges non-emergency patients to avoid using A&E services and instead seek treatment at GOPCs, private doctors or 24-hour outpatient services at private hospitals to reduce pressure on public hospital A&Es. Members of the public can visit the Health Bureau (HKB)'s Primary Care Directory (www.pcdirectory.gov.hk). The HKB has also collated information of private hospitals, healthcare facilities, family doctors and Chinese medicine clinics that will be in operation during the 2024 Christmas and 2025 New Year holidays across the city. The information (including addresses, phone numbers and operation hours) of the relevant hospitals and clinics have been uploaded to the online portal (www.map.gov.hk/gm/s/hhbclinic/all?lg=en) for public reference in collaboration with the Spatial Data Office of the Development Bureau and the Lands Department.

The HA will implement special refund arrangements in the A&E Departments to provide stable patients with flexibility in choosing alternative medical institutions. While waiting for medical consultation at A&E, patients who wish to seek treatment at other healthcare institutions can raise a refund request for the A&E charges directly from staff on duty at the registration counter. To provide patients with greater convenience, the system has been enhanced and no longer requires form-filling. "HA Go" members may also submit refund applications through the HA mobile app "HA Go". This arrangement applies only to patients who have not been attended to by doctors, and

applications must be made within 24 hours of registration. Eligible applicants will receive the refund in approximately one month by cheque by mail, credit card or electronic wallet.

The HA also appeals to members of the public to get vaccinated early for seasonal influenza and COVID-19, especially high-risk groups, to reduce the chance of infection for themselves and their family members, as well as to reduce critical cases and deaths. Members of the public may find details on the Centre for Health Protection COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106934.html) and the Vaccination Schemes website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/17980.html).

The HA expects the service demand surge special measures will last until February 9, 2025 (the 12th day of Chinese New Year), after the Chinese New Year holiday. During this period, the HA will closely monitor the situation and flexibly deploy hospital beds, resources and manpower to increase its service volume in order to meet the heightened demand while ensuring that emergency services remain unaffected.