

Hospital Authority public holidays service arrangements facilitates smooth operations of public hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for the Hospital Authority (HA) said today (April 8) that the service arrangements during and after Easter and Ching Ming Festival public holidays helped to cope with the service demand surge and alleviate the service pressure on the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Departments. The operations of public hospitals were maintained smoothly in general.

The service arrangements included increasing General Outpatient Clinics (GOPCs) and Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs) services during public holidays, implementing a special refund arrangement at A&E Departments, flexibly mobilising manpower and beds, enhancing support for discharge procedures so as to expedite hospital bed turnover, etc. During Easter and Ching Ming Festival public holidays, apart from the 14 public holiday GOPCs, four GOPCs provided additional services on April 1 with a total quota of about 10 000. As for CMCTRs located in the 18 districts, they enhanced the government-subsidised Chinese medicine outpatient services by providing for a total quota of 12 000 in the period of Easter holidays and the first week of April.

In addition, in order to alleviate the impact of service demand surge on public healthcare system, the Health Bureau has collated information of private hospitals, healthcare facilities, family doctors and Chinese medicine clinics which were in operation during the holidays across the city. The information (including addresses, phone numbers and operation hours) of the relevant hospitals and clinics have been uploaded to an online portal for public reference in collaboration with the Spatial Data Office of the Development Bureau and the Lands Department, to facilitate citizens to look for suitable hospitals or clinics for medical treatment.

Data from the HA shows that during Easter and Ching Ming Festival public holidays, the quota utilisation rate of GOPCs was more than 90 per cent. In the period of Easter holidays and the first week of April, the quota utilisation rate of CMCTRs was close to 90 per cent. The spokesperson said, "Increasing quota in GOPCs and CMCTRs was able to help cope with citizens' demand for consultation during the holidays."

Regarding the operation of A&E Departments, from March 28 to April 7, attendance of over 60 000 was recorded. During this period, the A&E first attendance in public hospitals ranged from about 5 100 to about 6 000 daily while the median of waiting time of semi-urgent and non-urgent patients ranged from two hours to three hours. To cope with service demands, A&E Departments implemented the special refund arrangement which effectively

alleviated pressure on A&E Departments and the operation was generally smooth.

The special refund arrangement in A&E Departments has concluded. From March 28 to April 7, 999 applications for refund have so far been received, accounting for around 1.6 per cent of the total number of attendances. The applications are currently under process and eligible applicants will be refunded by cheque sent via mail, by credit card or electronic wallet.

The spokesperson emphasised, "The operation of the special refund arrangement has been smooth, allowing stable and mild patients to have more flexibility in choosing alternative private medical institutions, thus diverting patients and alleviating the service pressure on A&E Departments, enabling them to concentrate resources of taking care of patients in need."

"After implementation of the above special measures, the operation of all public hospitals remained smooth during this period, and the overall pressure on public hospitals was alleviated. In particular, the waiting time for patients admitted to the wards through the A&E Departments has been improved. However, the HA noted that some patients did not show up after making appointments at the GOPCs and CMCTRs. The HA appeals to patients to proactively cancel their appointments if consultation service is not in need due to other arrangement, so that patients in need can receive medical services more easily and in a timely manner."

Moreover, recent surveillance data shows that both COVID-19 and influenza activities are still active in Hong Kong and other regions. The HA appeals to members of the public to get vaccinated early for COVID-19 and seasonal influenza, especially high-risk groups, to reduce the chance of getting infected for themselves and their family members, as well as to reduce critical cases and deaths. Regardless of the number of doses received previously, high-risk groups are recommended to receive a dose of COVID-19 vaccine at least six months since the last dose or infection.

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 is thankful for patients' understanding, and also the frontline healthcare staff who stayed on duty during public holidays. A&E and inpatient services remained smooth because staff from all disciplines stood fast and remained at their posts, taking care of patients wholeheartedly. The HA will continue to monitor the service statistics of public hospitals and conclude the experience gained from implementing special measures this time and feedback received from different stakeholders, so as to help implement appropriate measures in the future so that A&E Department resources can be used for citizens who are most in need of healthcare services.