

LCQ8: Lung Mei Beach

Following is a question by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (August 25):

Question:

The artificial Tai Po Lung Mei Beach opened for use on June 23 this year. It has been reported that on the first five days after the Beach's opening, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) recorded respectively 63 and 27 cases of members of the public claiming to have been pricked/stung by sea urchins and jellyfish at the Beach. Such kind of cases still occur from time to time at present. Some lifeguards have criticized the Government for not having conducted relevant risk assessment prior to opening the Beach. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on those cases in which members of the public claimed to have been pricked/stung respectively by sea urchins and jellyfish at Lung Mei Beach as recorded by LCSD since June 23 this year: (i) the number of cases (with a breakdown by the severity of the injury sustained by those members of the public), (ii) the number of members of the public sent to hospital for treatment, (iii) whether those members of the public got pricked/stung mainly in the water or on the beach, and (iv) the major species of the sea urchins and jellyfish involved as well as whether they were venomous;

(2) of the corresponding measures put in place by LCSD in respect of the aforesaid cases, including: (i) whether it has increased the number of lifeguards on duty, (ii) whether it has arranged for its staff members to regularly conduct patrol and inspection as well as remove the sea urchins and jellyfish (especially during low tide), and (iii) what additional support it has provided to lifeguards;

(3) (i) whether LCSD has issued instructions to its staff members on how to handle sea urchins and jellyfish, (ii) of the respective quantities of sea urchins and jellyfish removed by LCSD from Lung Mei Beach since June 23 this year, and (iii) what mechanism LCSD has put in place to handle the sea urchins and jellyfish found in the swimming zone of Lung Mei Beach and whether LCSD has comprehensively reviewed such mechanism; if LCSD has reviewed, of the outcome and improvement measures; if LCSD has not reviewed, the reasons for that and whether LCSD will forthwith conduct such a review; and

(4) whether LCSD has assessed if Lung Mei Beach is still suitable to be open for public use at present; if LCSD has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the measures that LCSD has put or will put in place to reduce the risks of members of the public being pricked/stung by sea urchins and jellyfish there?

Reply:

President,

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has duly completed all relevant preparatory work before opening the Tai Po Lung Mei Beach (the Beach) for public use. My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan is as follows:

(1), (2) & (3) LCSD handled 110 cases and 51 cases of swimmers getting slightly stung or pricked after stepping on sea urchins and after touching jellyfish in water respectively from June 23 to August 15 this year. 80 per cent of these cases occurred on June 26 and 27 (87 cases) and July 10 and 11 (41 cases). Between mid-July and mid-August, there were only four recorded cases of stepping on sea urchins over four days and two cases of touching jellyfish over two days. There were no swimmers being stung or pricked by sea urchins or jellyfish as recorded in the remaining days. All the above-mentioned cases involved minor injuries, and the swimmers left on their own after receiving basic treatment from LCSD staff.

LCSD has adopted a number of measures including putting up within the beach area advisory notices, banners, water buoys, and making timely broadcasts to remind swimmers to be careful by not stepping on or touching sea organisms such as sea urchins and jellyfish. In addition, verbal reminders to swimmers were given by patrolling lifeguards and beach ambassadors. Injuries caused by sea urchins or jellyfish significantly dropped after implementation of the above measures.

The sea urchin and jellyfish concerned are common species found in Hong Kong waters. They grow naturally in the sea, including within the boundaries of beaches. Work such as translocations of sea urchins is mainly undertaken by the contractor of LCSD. Sea organisms found in the swimming zone would be carefully translocated to outside the swimming zone for growth by the contractor as and when necessary. Lifeguards on patrol will also remind swimmers to observe water safety, including beware of and not to step on sea urchins.

Currently, there are 13 lifeguards carrying out daily lifesaving work on a shift basis at the Beach. Besides, starting from July 1, 2021, LCSD has arranged two additional honorary lifeguards to provide supplementary lifesaving services during weekends and public holidays when the patronage of swimmers is usually high. Auxiliary Medical Service or Hong Kong St. John Ambulance Association have also been arranged to provide support to the first aid services at the Beach.

(4) The seawater level of the Beach changes with the tides. At times when the seabed area laid under deep water becomes shallower during ebbs, swimmers may be easily injured when they step on the sea organisms inhabiting on the seabed. As mentioned above, LCSD has been implementing a number of measures to remind swimmers to be cautious. Injuries caused by sea organisms have

dropped significantly since then. LCSD will continue to closely monitor the situation at the Beach and remind swimmers to be careful of not stepping on or touching sea organisms whilst conserving wildlife.