

LCQ8: Management of public swimming pool complexes

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 (July 7):

Question:

Since April 2 this year, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has reopened one after another the public swimming pool (swimming pool) complexes that had been closed earlier due to the epidemic. However, in order to reduce the risk of epidemic spreading, LCSD has adopted a number of special measures for the reopened swimming pool complexes, including limiting the attendances to 30 per cent of their capacities (such percentage having been relaxed to 50 per cent since June 24) and opening the swimming pool facilities only partly. At present, some swimming pool complexes are still closed. Regarding the management of swimming pool complexes, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on those swimming pool complexes that have all along been closed since April 2 this year: (i) the names of the complexes, (ii) the reasons for closure, (iii) the facilities which have been closed, (iv) the estimated number of affected swimmers, (v) the expected earliest reopening dates, and (vi) the considerations for determining the reopening dates;

(2) as the epidemic has now subsided, and it has been reported that recently there have been instances of a large number of swimmers waiting outside a number of swimming pool complexes for 30 minutes or more before they were admitted, whether LCSD will further raise the ceiling for the attendances at swimming pool complexes and open all swimming pool facilities in the various complexes; if not, of the reasons for that;

(3) of the total number of full-time and part-time seasonal lifeguards since April 2 this year who worked for less numbers of days or hours due to the partial or full closure of swimming pool complexes; the highest, lowest and average numbers of their working hours per week which were cut; the respective current numbers of full-time and part-time seasonal lifeguards whose working hours are below the levels in the swimming seasons before the epidemic; whether it has provided financial support for those seasonal lifeguards whose income has dropped due to reduced working hours; if so, of the details;

(4) whether the arrangement of cutting working hours has resulted in wastage of or difficulties in recruiting seasonal lifeguards; whether there is a shortage of seasonal lifeguards in any swimming pool complexes at present; if so, of the details of the shortage; and

(5) of the estimated (i) staff establishment and strength of civil service lifeguards in swimming pool complexes and (ii) number of seasonal lifeguards to be recruited, for the coming year; how such figures compare with those in the past two years?

Reply:

President,

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) currently provides 44 public swimming pools in the 18 districts over the territory. My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan is as follows:

(1) LCSD has reopened 40 public swimming pools to date. Only four public swimming pools are still temporarily closed, including Kowloon Tsai Swimming Pool which is under redevelopment (works scheduled for completion in 2024 tentatively). The other three swimming pools, namely Ho Man Tin Swimming Pool, Sheung Shui Swimming Pool and Jockey Club Yan Oi Tong Swimming Pool, are all leisure pools.

Under the current directions of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (the Regulation), leisure pools, children's pools, toddlers' pools and Jacuzzis (if any) should remain closed. Thus, the above-mentioned three public swimming pools cannot be reopened at this stage. LCSD does not have any estimation on the number of swimmers being affected by the closure of swimming pool complexes owing to the pandemic. LCSD will review the opening arrangements of facilities having regard to the latest development of the pandemic as well as the directions for scheduled premises as stipulated in the Regulation.

(2) According to the latest directions under the Regulation issued on June 22, 2021, the maximum number of persons allowed in swimming pools has been relaxed to 50 per cent of capacity with effect from June 24, 2021. LCSD has immediately made an upward adjustment on the maximum number of persons allowed to be admitted in public swimming pool. LCSD will pay close attention to the latest development of the pandemic as well as the directions for scheduled premises as stipulated in the Regulation and review the above-mentioned opening arrangements in due course.

(3) & (4) The lifeguards employed by LCSD include civil service lifeguards and seasonal lifeguards employed during the swimming season. As at June 1, 2021, there were 1 372 civil service lifeguards (including senior lifeguards) and 214 seasonal lifeguards in LCSD. All 214 seasonal lifeguards are non-civil service contract full-time seasonal lifeguards employed on a monthly basis. Their income will not be affected by the closure of swimming pool complexes.

To ensure the safety of swimmers, LCSD will provide sufficient lifeguards on duty at the public swimming pools while they are open for service. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, LCSD's public swimming pools were closed between December 2020 and March 2021. The selection interview and

trade test for seasonal lifeguards for this year, originally scheduled during this period, were also suspended. As LCSD has been reopening some public swimming pools starting from April 2, 2021, the selection interview and trade test for seasonal lifeguards have been resumed. The recruitment exercise is being expedited. It is expected that both full-time and part-time seasonal lifeguards will report for duty gradually to provide services to pools and beaches in need.

(5) Due to the short-term job nature, the mobility of seasonal lifeguards is higher than that of civil service lifeguards. Furthermore, the effectiveness of recruiting seasonal lifeguards is more affected by employment conditions at the time of recruitment. To improve the stability of the lifeguard workforce, LCSD has secured additional resources for creating a total of 161 civil service lifeguard posts in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to replace the same number of seasonal lifeguard posts. All these posts have been filled and the recruited lifeguards will report for duty gradually. The ratio of vacancies of civil service lifeguards to the establishment remained at a low level, and there was adequate supply of suitable candidates to fill the vacancies of civil service lifeguards.

As for the seasonal lifeguards who are additionally recruited during the swimming season to augment lifeguard services during that period, their manpower requirement will be adjusted in light of actual operational needs. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, public swimming pools were temporarily closed for some time in 2020. Hence, the manpower requirement of lifeguards for the year is not comparable to that for the coming year. Subject to the development of the pandemic and actual operational needs, LCSD will conduct necessary recruitment exercises in due course.