

SLW appeals to foreign domestic helpers and employers to join hands in prevention of epidemic spread (with photo/video)

The Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, today (April 2) called upon foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) and their employers to exercise a mutual understanding on rest day arrangements. He thanked FDHs for their contributions to Hong Kong society and appealed to them to observe social distancing in the fight against COVID-19. A series of publicity measures are underway to convey the messages.

In a video message appealing to all FDHs and employers to join hands in this fight, Dr Law said, "The Government has prohibited group gatherings with more than four people in public places. Offenders are liable to prosecution. We fully understand that most helpers would like to meet their friends during their rest days. However, we are now at a critical juncture in our fight against COVID-19, and it is essential that all of us practise social distancing to prevent the spread of the disease."

With effect from March 29 to April 11, group gatherings with more than four people in public places are prohibited and offenders are liable to a fixed penalty of \$2,000, or if charged in a court, a maximum penalty of fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Dr Law also appealed to employers to understand the current special circumstances and discuss the rest day arrangements with their helpers by encouraging them to stay home for rest, or take their rest day on weekdays instead of at the weekend. "Employers are also reminded that it is against the law to refuse to grant a rest day or compel your helpers to work on a rest day without consent," he added.

A wide range of publicity efforts have been undertaken to drive home the above messages. These include joint efforts with consulates-general to convey the messages to their nationals through their websites and social media platforms; putting up and distributing posters and leaflets (available in major FDH languages, including Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia and Thai) across the territory as well as through electronic means; and broadcasting appeal messages in radio programmes targeting FDHs.

Furthermore, some frequently asked questions and answers on rest day arrangements and relevant employment matters are available on the dedicated FDH portal (www.fdh.labour.gov.hk) of the Labour Department (LD) for employers' reference.

Apart from social distancing measures, the Government has implemented initiatives to assist employers and FDHs to cope with the special

circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic:

- All FDH contracts that expire on or before June 30 may be extended up to July 31 upon mutual agreement between the employer and the FDH (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202003/19/P2020031900394.htm);
- FDHs whose existing contracts are due to expire or are terminated on or before July 31 may apply to the Immigration Department (ImmD) for an extension of limit of stay in Hong Kong (for a maximum period of one month) as visitor to facilitate them to find a new employer in Hong Kong (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202003/21/P2020032000829.htm); and
- FDHs on a renewed contract with the same employer upon completion of the current contract, or those due to start a new contract with a new employer may apply to ImmD for deferring home leave for no more than 18 months.

For any update and health information on COVID-19, please visit the Government's "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/). Information in Chinese, English, Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, Hindi, Sinhala, Bengali, Nepali and Urdu is available.

Should FDHs and their employers have enquiries on employment matters, they may seek the LD's assistance through its dedicated email account for FDH matters (fdh-enquiry@labour.gov.hk) and through the online form on its dedicated FDH portal (www.fdh.labour.gov.hk).

