

LCQ6: Measures to cope with the peak period of respiratory tract infections

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (January 17):

Question:

It has been reported that the number of respiratory tract infection cases has been on the rise in recent months. Apart from the commonly seen influenza virus and novel coronavirus infection cases, the numbers of rhinovirus, Mycoplasma pneumoniae, adenovirus and respiratory syncytial virus infection cases have also increased. Some patients have even been infected with three to four viruses at the same time, and such a situation has particularly posed a threat to the health of children and the elderly. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the activity levels of various types of respiratory tract viruses, the number of outbreaks of respiratory tract infections reported by schools and residential care homes and the number of persons infected, and the number of admissions to public hospitals due to respiratory tract infections, in each of the past six months;

(2) as it is learnt that as at the 1st of this month, the seasonal influenza vaccination uptake rates in the two groups of children aged six months to under six and persons aged 65 or above still did not reach 50 per cent, what measures the authorities have in place to step up promotion among these groups, and whether they will set vaccination targets to reduce the impact of outbreaks of seasonal influenza; and

(3) as there are views that respiratory tract infections enter a peak period from February to March every year and, with the Lunar New Year holidays falling in February this year, the risk of respiratory tract infection will increase, whether the Health Bureau has issued guidelines to other policy bureaux and government departments to assist them in preventing a large scale outbreak of respiratory tract infections on the front of public disease prevention and coping with the relevant situation?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong has entered the first winter after the lifting of mandatory mask-wearing requirements. Although this winter is not very cold, various respiratory infectious diseases start to show a rising trend. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) also already announced that Hong Kong entered the influenza season on January 11 this

year, with the influenza season expected to last for eight to twelve weeks, in addition to the possible transmission of influenza and COVID-19 at the same time. The DH, the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Primary Healthcare Office have been prepared and implemented specific measures for prevention and control of respiratory infectious diseases. This was also reported to the Panel on Health Services of the Legislative Council in October last year. The CHP and the HA held three press conferences in the past two months to appeal to and help the public heighten vigilance.

Apart from the Health Bureau (HKB) and the healthcare system steering the prevention and control of diseases, all sectors of the society must join hands in response. As prevention is better than cure, rather than putting out fire, fire should be prevented. Vaccination is an important firewall. In particular, I appeal to those who have not yet received influenza vaccination to do so as soon as possible, and high-risk groups to receive a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in a timely manner as well. All currently available COVID-19 vaccines, including the inactivated (i.e. Sinovac vaccine), mRNA ancestral strain or bivalent, and XBB vaccines which will be extended to all high-risk priority groups tomorrow (January 18), are effective in preventing severe illnesses and death.

The public should also maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. When going out to crowded places, individuals who are at high risk or developing symptoms should wear a surgical mask in particular. Those developing symptoms should even consider staying at home and seeking appropriate medical treatment according to situations. As residential care home (RCH) residents belong to the high-risk group, the Government has all along been providing guidelines to staff members and visitors of RCHs on continuing to wear surgical masks. Such guidelines are still effective as at now and have also been complied by RCHs. Patients, visitors and staff members are also required to wear a surgical mask in the patient care areas of public healthcare institutions.

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Kenneth Leung is as follows:

(1) Statistics

The CHP has all along been closely monitoring the situation of local respiratory infectious diseases. In the past six months, the activity of various respiratory infections in Hong Kong varied. The activity level of COVID-19 started to rise in mid-December from the low base. As regards seasonal influenza, we went through the active summer influenza season from August to October last year. In spite of returning to a low level, influenza started to edge higher in early December. The activity level of COVID-19 and seasonal influenza, outbreaks of respiratory tract infections in schools and RCHs, and the number of weekly hospital admissions for respiratory tract infections over the past six months are at Annex I to Annex III respectively.

(2) Vaccination

Since the launch of the 2023/24 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination (SIV) programmes, over 1.73 million doses of SIV have been administered so far, representing an increase of over 20 per cent as compared with that of the same period of last year. A significant increase in SIV uptake rate among high-risk groups, especially the elderly and children, is observed when compared with those of previous years. 80 per cent of the elderly in RCHs for the elderly already received SIV. The vaccination rate of the elderly in the community has reached nearly 50 per cent, while that of children is over 50 per cent which reflects an approximate increase of 40 per cent compared with the last season.

The Government has also already implemented targeted measures for the high-risk groups:

- For children, the CHP has solicited assistance from the Education Bureau, parent teacher associations and district-based school associations in encouraging more schools to participate in the school outreach vaccination, and also contacted schools that have not enrolled to provide targeted assistance.
- As for the elderly living in the community, the Visiting Health Teams of the DH has promoted the prevention of influenza and COVID-19 to the elderly and their carers. Fourteen designated Elderly Health Centres have been providing SIV for members as well as all the elderly aged 65 or above.
- As regards residents of RCHs for the elderly and persons with disabilities, the DH has adopted an opt-out approach for its outreach vaccination for those residents. The Social Welfare Department has also urged RCHs to proactively arrange vaccination by visiting medical officers for timely vaccination of residents. The CHP also launched a new round of the outreach vaccination service special programme for RCHs in December last year for door-to-door vaccination.

Besides, the District Health Centres have held over 200 events since October last year to promote vaccination, providing members of the public with information on the list of private doctors enrolled in the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, assisting vaccination booking, and providing SIV at their centres in collaboration with private doctors.

As for the target of vaccination rate, the relevant Scientific Committees have not set a specific target on the SIV rate. Nevertheless, the higher the vaccination rate among the high-risk groups, the better the results in preventing serious illnesses caused by influenza. A significant increase of over 20 per cent in the uptake under this year's SIV programmes is noted as compared with that of the same period of last year. The

Government will continue such active promotion.

(3) Prevention and Control

The CHP has been working with various government departments and stakeholders for better prevention and control of the risks of respiratory infectious diseases. Relevant measures include:

- (i) formulation of health guidelines on the prevention of and responses to seasonal influenza and COVID-19, etc, for reference of various sectors including schools, RCHs, employers and employees, etc;
- (ii) issuance of a guideline on the prevention of influenza and COVID-19 in RCHs for the elderly and persons with disabilities in November last year;
- (iii) issuance of letters to schools, RCHs and healthcare organisations, etc, at the end of last year to remind them to take preventive measures and report outbreaks for prompt epidemiological investigation;
- (iv) having held three press conferences to appeal to and help the public heighten vigilance; and
- (v) dissemination of the latest information on the prevention of and responses to respiratory infectious diseases to the public through other departments, such as conveying information to the District Councils and stakeholders including Care Teams (District Services and Community Care Teams).

In addition, the HA has formulated a phasic response plan, would review the service demand, and deploy manpower and resources in response, including providing comprehensive respiratory panel testing for paediatric patients, conducting COVID-19 admission screening for patients with higher risks, as well as ensuring adequate stock of antiviral drugs, etc.

In response to the peak season of respiratory infectious diseases, the HHB and healthcare sector have strenuously steered the prevention and control of diseases. The public should strengthen personal protection and take up primary responsibility for managing their own health.

Thank you, President.

LCQ21: Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by

the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, in the Legislative Council today (January 17):

Question:

To resolve district-based environmental hygiene and street management issues, the Government implemented the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (the Programme) in mid-August 2022, with the targets of (i) tackling 600-odd hygiene black spots and strengthening the cleansing of about 4 000 public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards; (ii) stepping up law enforcement; and (iii) enhancing public education and publicity. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the changes in the conditions of the hygiene black spots concerned since the implementation of the Programme, and set out the relevant information by District Council district;
- (2) whether it has gained an understanding of the causes of various hygiene black spots, as well as their impacts on environmental hygiene and cityscape; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) of the details of the Government's work in relation to the cleansing of public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards (including the specific data and the locations involved) since the implementation of the Programme; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the relevant work in the past year; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) whether it has conducted an assessment on the overall effectiveness of the Programme; if so, of the details (including the changes in hygiene conditions and the number of complaints); if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) as it is learnt that some hygiene black spots have revived after the Programme has been implemented for some time, of the new measures put in place by the authorities to follow up the situation concerned, so as to ensure that the effectiveness of the Programme is sustainable?

Reply:

President,

Our consolidated reply to the Hon Chan Pui-leung's question is as follows:

The current-term Government is committed to improving environmental hygiene and street management and putting a great emphasis on district-based environmental issues. The aim is to safeguard public health, build a liveable environment for citizens and boost our city's image. In this connection, the Chief Executive (CE) appointed the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration (DCS) in July 2022 to lead the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force for

steering efforts of various bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to enhance the overall environmental hygiene and cityscape in Hong Kong, and to step up the cleansing intensity in public places and handle thorny environmental hygiene and street management issues at root. Among these efforts, the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (the Programme) launched in mid-August 2022 focuses on tackling environmental hygiene black spots and strengthening the cleansing of about 4 000 public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards.

In order to provide an additional channel for the public to report environmental hygiene issues on the district level, the Government further launched a thematic website of the Programme in January 2023. Providing a list of hygiene black spots in various districts across the city on an online map, the website enables citizens to compare the situation of these black spots before and after the Government's clearance operations, and to witness and monitor programme effectiveness, thereby enhancing the transparency of the Programme. Also, it facilitates citizens to provide feedback on listed black spots (including those which are deemed to have been rectified) or suggest new black spots for consideration by departments. Having received information (e.g. detailed addresses and photos) from the public via the website, departments will conduct on-site inspections, take follow-up actions and make responses. Once verified, newly reported black spots will be added to the list of hygiene black spots of the Programme. As at January 2024, the thematic website accumulated nearly 24 900 hits and collected about 1 560 public comments. Generally speaking, the environmental hygiene problems in majority of the newly reported spots are reviewed and concluded by departments as short-term and non-continuous, and could effectively be resolved with low chance of recurrence with cleansing and inspection efforts. Since the launch of the website, 32 newly reported spots in need of sustained attention have been added by departments to the list of black spots.

According to the feedback from different organisations and citizens, the number of listed hygiene black spots has increased from the initial 663 to 738. The updated number of black spots in each district (with a breakdown by District Council district) is as follows:

District Council district	At the start of the Programme	As at December 31, 2023
Central and Western District	65	66
Eastern District	22	24
Southern District	9	10
Wan Chai District	16	18
Kowloon City District	87	91
Kwun Tong District	24	26
Sham Shui Po District	26	31
Wong Tai Sin District	22	25

Yau Tsim Mong District	26	59
Islands District	58	60
Kwai Tsing District	10	15
North District	60	62
Sai Kung District	10	10
Sha Tin District	19	22
Tai Po District	134	135
Tsuen Wan District	23	23
Tuen Mun District	27	31
Yuen Long District	25	30
	663	738

With the concerted efforts and active facilitation of various departments, most black spots have improved in their hygiene conditions. The average number of comments collected monthly via the thematic website has decreased from over 240 in the first three months at the start of the Programme to about 70 in the latest three months. Such a decrease could help demonstrate that citizens recognise the improved conditions of hygiene black spots. Moreover, according to the review results of various departments in December 2023, hygiene conditions of more than 80 per cent of black spots have been significantly improved and these spots are suitable for removal from the list. In the 2022 Policy Address, the CE has set a key performance indicator (KPI) for the Programme, i.e. removing at least 75 per cent of environmental hygiene black spots by end-2023. In other words, our work in this regard has already met the target. However, as we need to nurture a new culture of keeping the environment clean and protecting the cityscape in Hong Kong, we do not intend to actually remove any hygiene black spots from the list at this stage despite the notable improvements in their environmental hygiene conditions. The departments concerned will sustain their efforts and closely monitor the hygiene conditions of these improved spots.

Regarding the cleansing of public places and clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards, the Government has all along attached great importance to signboard safety and adopted a multipronged approach to deal with unauthorised, dangerous or abandoned signboards under a "risk-based" principle. For signboards constituting obvious threats to life or property, the Buildings Department (BD) will take immediate enforcement actions. If signboards are abandoned or have become dangerous, irrespective of whether they are legal or not, the BD may order their removal by issuing Dangerous Structure Removal Notices to signboard owners in accordance with section 105 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). A total of 1 750 dangerous or abandoned signboards were removed/repaired during the whole year of 2022, and another 1 780 from January to end-November 2023.

Under the new district governance structure, the Steering Committee on District Governance chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration will be responsible for taking a leading role on the overall strategy, specific

policies and measures, work priorities and resource allocation of district governance, whereas the Task Force on District Governance (TFDG) chaired by the DCS will be responsible for steering and co-ordinating various B/Ds to carry out district work and implement corresponding policies and measures, and co-ordinating inter-departmental and/or cross-district issues as necessary. Under this structure, the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force has been revamped as the Working Group on Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape and put under the TFDG. Through the Working Group, the DCS will continue to lead the departments concerned to follow up on ongoing environmental hygiene work.

Apart from keeping a close watch over the latest situation of improvements in hygiene black spots and removal of dangerous or abandoned signboards, the TFDG and various departments will take appropriate measures to step up efforts in cleansing, inspections and law enforcement so as to achieve the goal of keeping the city clean in the long term. The Government has also conducted a comprehensive review on the existing statutory powers and penalties of environmental hygiene-related legislation to enhance its efficiency, effectiveness and deterrence in handling various thorny environmental hygiene problems. The legislative review has been implemented in two stages. The first-stage proposal on raising the fixed penalty and the maximum fines that may be imposed by the court for offences related to environmental hygiene and shopfront extension has come into effect since October 22, 2023.

The Government now proposes to amend the above-mentioned Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) and other related ordinances, supplemented by additional administrative measures, to enhance enforcement efficiency and deterrence, so as to achieve long-term improvements in the "longstanding, big and difficult" problems on environmental hygiene, public health nuisances and street management. The Government consulted the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene of the Legislative Council on the preliminary proposals on the second-stage legislative amendments in July 2023 and subsequently launched a two-month public consultation on November 21, 2023. We will earnestly listen to the community's views on the second-stage legislative amendment proposals before finalising them.

[Appeal for information on missing woman in Ta Kwu Ling \(with photo\)](#)

Police today (January 17) appealed to the public for information on a woman who went missing in Ta Kwu Ling.

Leung Jonica, aged 66, went missing after she left a caring centre on Ping Che Road yesterday (January 16) afternoon. The staff of caring centre

made a report to Police on the same day.

She is about 1.58 metres tall, 44 kilograms in weight and of medium build. She has a round face with yellow complexion and short grey hair. She was last seen wearing a green long sleeves shirt, pink trousers, and pink slippers.

Anyone who knows the whereabouts of the missing woman or may have seen her is urged to contact the Regional Missing Persons Unit of New Territories North on 3661 3127 or email to rmpu-ntn-1@police.gov.hk, or contact any police station.



[DGCA visits Shanghai \(with photos\)](#)

The Director-General of Civil Aviation, Mr Victor Liu, visited Shanghai between January 15 and 17, and paid courtesy calls on various aviation authorities and organisations to conduct in-depth exchanges on the latest developments in civil aviation and various other fields.

Mr Liu called on the Director-General of the East China Regional Administration of the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC), Mr Wan Xiangdong, and visited the Shanghai Aircraft Airworthiness Certification Centre of the CAAC. Mr Liu exchanged views with them on matters of common interest and looked into ways to foster closer co-operation to grasp the opportunities presented by the National 14th Five-Year Plan.

During his stay in Shanghai, Mr Liu also visited the China Eastern Airlines Corporation Limited, the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China, Ltd, Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport and Shanghai Pudong International Airport to understand the latest developments and exchange views on various aviation topics.

The delegation included the Assistant Director-General of Civil Aviation (Airport Standards), Miss Clara Wong, and the Assistant Director-General of Civil Aviation (Flight Standards), Mr Michael Yuen.

Mr Liu will return to Hong Kong tonight (January 17).



Special announcement on fire in waters at New Yau Ma Tei Typhoon Shelter

Attention TV and radio duty announcers:

Please broadcast the following special announcement as soon as possible, and repeat it at suitable intervals:

A fire broke out on a vessel in waters at the New Yau Ma Tei Typhoon Shelter at 5.21pm today (January 17). The Fire Services Department is conducting a firefighting operation.

Members of the public who are being affected by the smoke and an unusual odour carried by the wind are advised to close their doors and windows and stay calm.