

Employers and employees should take precautions during cold weather

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following special announcement immediately, and repeat it at frequent intervals when the Cold Weather Warning is in force:

The Labour Department reminds employers that as the Cold Weather Warning is in force, they should take appropriate precautions such as reminding employees who have to work outdoors or in remote areas to wear appropriately warm clothing, and make arrangements for employees to rotate from outdoor to indoor or sheltered work sites as far as possible. Employees should take note of the weather report, wear appropriately warm clothing and be mindful of their health conditions. They should notify their supervisors and seek medical help immediately if feeling unwell, such as having cold limbs and body shivering.

CHP reminds public on precautions against cold weather

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 19) reminded the public, particularly the elderly and people with chronic illnesses, to adopt appropriate measures to protect their health in view of the cold weather.

A spokesman for the CHP said that cold weather can easily trigger or exacerbate diseases, especially among the elderly and persons suffering from heart disease, respiratory illnesses or other chronic illnesses.

"Elderly people have less insulating fat beneath their skin to keep them warm, and their body temperature control mechanisms may be weaker. Their body may not be able to appropriately respond to the cold weather," the spokesman said.

Some senior persons may have decreased mobility, which can impair their ability to generate and conserve body heat. Chronic illnesses, such as hypertension, diabetes and endocrine disorders, may undermine the health of elderly people and lower their metabolic rate, subsequently causing their body to generate less heat. Persons with chronic illnesses, such as chronic respiratory illnesses or heart disease, are vulnerable to disease aggravation due to cold weather.

The CHP reminded the public, in particular the elderly and persons with chronic illnesses, to adopt the following preventive measures:

- Take note of the weather forecast. Wear warm clothing, including hats, scarves, gloves and socks, accordingly;
- Consume sufficient food to ensure adequate calorie intake;
- Perform regular exercise to facilitate blood circulation and heat production;
- Stay in a warm environment and avoid prolonged outdoor exposure;
- Use heaters with care and maintain adequate indoor ventilation; and
- Seek medical advice if feeling unwell.

â€œIn addition, the public should avoid alcoholic beverages.

"Drinking alcohol cannot keep you warm. Alcohol accelerates the loss of body heat through dilated blood vessels, resulting in chilling instead," the spokesman said.

"Parents should ensure that babies are sufficiently warm, but it is also important to keep babies relatively lightly clothed to avoid overheating them," the spokesman added.

Parents should observe the following safety measures when putting their children to bed:

- Keep the room well ventilated and at a comfortable temperature;
- Always place babies on their backs to sleep. Leave their heads, faces and arms uncovered during sleep;
- Babies do not need pillows. Place babies on a firm and well-fitted mattress to sleep. Avoid soft objects, pillows and loose bedding;
- Let babies sleep in a cot placed near their parents' bed; and
- Maintain a smoke-free environment.

In addition, many respiratory pathogens, including influenza and SARS-CoV-2, may have increasing activity and community transmission during winter. Seasonal influenza vaccination is recommended for all persons aged 6 months or above, except those with known contraindications. Persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive seasonal influenza vaccinations early. Please see details of the vaccination schemes on the CHP's [website](#).

A person who gets influenza and COVID-19 at the same time may be more seriously ill and would have a higher risk of death. It is important for elderly persons, especially those residing in residential care homes, to receive both a seasonal influenza vaccination and a COVID-19 vaccination. They should also receive an additional booster against COVID-19 according to recommendations as soon as possible. The public should also maintain good personal and environmental hygiene against respiratory illnesses and note the following:

- Surgical masks can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;
- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching one's eyes, mouth and nose;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub;
- Cover the mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly into a lidded rubbish bin and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly; and
- Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

Food-borne diseases, particularly those linked to hotpot cuisine, are also common in cold weather. The following preventive measures should be taken:

- Wash hands before handling and consuming food;
- Do not patronise unlicensed vendors or those with poor hygienic standards while selecting food;
- Wash and cook all food thoroughly;
- Vegetables should be washed thoroughly in clean running water before cooking and consumption. When appropriate, scrub vegetables with hard surfaces with a clean brush to remove dirt and substances, including pesticide residues and contaminants, from surfaces and crevices;
- Shrimps should be fully cooked until the shells turn red and the flesh turns white and opaque;
- For shellfish such as scallops and geoduck, scrub the shells thoroughly and remove internal organs;
- Do not eat any undercooked freshwater aquatic products. To ensure that the food is thoroughly cooked, the centre of the food should reach a temperature of at least 75 degrees Celsius so as to destroy pathogen;
- Most hotpot ingredients should be stored in a refrigerator at 4 degrees C or below, while frozen food should be stored in a freezer at -18 degrees C or below;
- Never use raw eggs as a dipping sauce for hotpot; and
- Use different sets of chopsticks to handle raw and cooked food to avoid cross-contamination.

â€œIn addition, when using fuel-burning appliances, especially in indoor areas, the public should ensure adequate ventilation to avoid harmful exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) and prevent CO poisoning.

For more health information, the public may call the DH's Health Education Infoline (2833 0111) or visit the [CHP's website](#) and [Facebook Fanpage](#).

The public may also call Dial-a-Weather (1878 200) or visit the [website of the Hong Kong Observatory](#) for the latest weather information and forecasts, or its [page on Weather Information for Senior Citizens](#).

HKMA announces inaugural cohort of GenA.I. Sandbox

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), in collaboration with the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited (Cyberport), announced today (December 19) the first cohort of the Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenA.I.) Sandbox.

A total of 15 use cases, from 10 banks and four technology partners (see Annex), have been selected as the inaugural participants in the GenA.I. Sandbox from over 40 proposals received. Each use case underwent a rigorous prioritisation process conducted by a selection committee comprising subject matter experts from the academia as well as from the HKMA and Cyberport. The prioritisation focused on the level of innovation, technical sophistication of the proposed solutions, expected contributions to the industry and adherence to fair-use principles (Note 1).

The proposed use cases mainly revolve around enhancing risk management, anti-fraud measures and customer experience. Through the GenA.I. Sandbox, banks will explore GenA.I.'s unique capabilities in processing vast amounts of documents and unstructured data, as well as its ability to handle cross-media inputs and outputs, such as text, audio and graphics. Notable examples include augmenting credit assessment and fraud detection by automated processing of unstructured data, and enhancing customer service to handle more personalised and complex enquiries, as an improvement over typical pre-defined chatbots.

The selected participants will be gradually onboarded to a dedicated platform of the Artificial Intelligence Supercomputing Centre operated by Cyberport, with technical trials expected to commence in early 2025 and continue through mid-2025. The HKMA and Cyberport will provide supervisory

and technical guidance to participants in an interactive and iterative manner throughout the trial processes. The HKMA will also draw insights from the technical trials and share best practices with the industry.

Deputy Chief Executive of the HKMA Mr Arthur Yuen said, "We are pleased to see a keen interest from the banking industry in the exploration of GenA.I., reflecting the eagerness and openness of banks of all sizes to utilise novel technologies in their operations and services. As the market continues to develop more innovative ideas, the GenA.I. Sandbox remains ready to provide a risk-controlled testing ground for the industry. We look forward to seeing the results from our participants and sharing these experiences with the industry. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Chan (Note 2), Professor Tam (Note 3) and Professor Yiu (Note 4) for offering their valuable expert advice as part of the selection committee."

The HKMA plans to announce the application process for the second cohort of the GenA.I. Sandbox by the end of the first quarter of 2025. Initial insights and learnings from the first cohort will be shared prior to the application deadline for the second cohort to facilitate formulation of trial use cases.

Note 1: HKMA Circular, "[Generative Artificial Intelligence Sandbox](#)" issued on September 20, 2024

Note 2: Professor Chan Chun-kwong, Programme Director, MSc/PgD in Financial Technology, Faculty of Engineering and Professor of Practice in Financial Technology, Department of Systems Engineering and Engineering Management, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Note 3: Professor Tam Kar-yan, Vice President for Administration and Business and Chair Professor of Information Systems, Business Statistics and Operations Management, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Note 4: Professor Yiu Siu-ming, Associate Director and Professor, School of Computing and Data Science, The University of Hong Kong

[Effective Exchange Rate Index](#)

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, December 19, 2024 is 107.5 (up 0.5 against yesterday's index).

42nd batch of applications approved for trials of green transport technologies and launch of Trial of Hydrogen Fuel Cell Heavy Vehicles under New Energy Transport Fund

The Environment and Ecology Bureau today (December 19) announced its approval of the 42nd batch of applications for trials of green transport technologies under the New Energy Transport Fund.

The Steering Committee of the Fund has adopted a merit-based approach to assess applications for funding with a view to making the best use of the Fund and taking into account factors including the latest technology developments. One application has been approved in this batch (Note) for the trial of an electric special-purpose vehicle as a mobile medical clinic, involving a total subsidy of \$0.75 million.

The latest approval brings the total number of trials approved under the Fund to 300, with a total subsidy of about \$243 million. As at end-November 2024, a total of 210 approved trials under the Fund have been completed. Trial reports have been uploaded to the Fund's website (www.eeb.gov.hk/en/new-energy-transport-fund/AT.html#Trial_Reports).

The technology of electric vehicles and batteries is becoming more mature and has been widely used in Mainland China and overseas cities. With the subsidy from the Fund, around 140 trials of electric commercial vehicles have been completed, with around 90 trials either set to commence soon or already commenced. The feasibility of local adoption of electric commercial vehicles has been fully verified through applications. To allow the Fund to focus on subsidising new energy technologies with a more pressing need for trials in the local context in future, the Steering Committee confirmed after discussion that the Fund will cease to accept applications for trials of all types of electric commercial vehicles from April 1, 2025. Applications received before that date will continue to be assessed using the merit-based approach.

Except for electric commercial vehicles, the Fund will continue to accept applications for trials of other types of new energy commercial vehicles to expedite the green transformation of the transport trade. The Fund has also launched the Funding Scheme to Trial of Hydrogen Fuel Cell Heavy Vehicles, which is open for applications from today. For more details, please visit the website of the scheme (www.eeb.gov.hk/en/Netfund/h2trial.html).

The Government put in place the Fund in March 2011 to subsidise the

testing and encourage wider use of green transport technologies for a variety of commercial transport tools, including goods vehicles (including special-purpose vehicles), taxis, light buses, buses, vessels, motorcycles, non-road vehicles (applicable to vehicle models approved by the Transport Department or the Airport Authority Hong Kong), or the aforesaid transport tools of charitable/non-profit making organisations providing services to their clients. The technologies to be subsidised include new energy vehicles or vessels, conversion of in-use conventional vehicles or vessels to new energy vehicles or vessels, and after-treatment emission reduction devices or fuel-saving devices applicable to vehicles and vessels. Transport operators and charitable/non-profit making organisations may apply for trying out different green technology products subject to a maximum subsidy of \$10 million for each application and a total of \$12 million for each applicant.

For more information on the Fund and the approved applications, please visit the website of the Fund (www.eeb.gov.hk/en/new-energy-transport-fund/new-energy-transport-fund.html) or call the enquiry hotline on 2824 0022.

Note: One electric special-purpose vehicle for Chinese medicine mobile clinic service by Pok Oi Hospital.