

LCQ16: Assisted reproduction services

â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Judy Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

It has been reported that there has been an increasing number of people choosing to use assisted reproduction services in recent years, for example, last year over 20 000 frozen eggs were stored in the institutions holding licences related to assisted reproduction services issued by the Council on Human Reproductive Technology (licensed centres) (commonly known as "egg freezing"), representing an increase of nearly 70% compared to two years ago. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the following information of each licensed centre at present: (i) the name of the institution, (ii) the type of institution (i.e. public and private), (iii) the type of licence, and (iv) the assisted reproduction services provided (set out in a table);
- (2) whether it knows the number of persons who used frozen-thawed eggs in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown by type of licensed centres (i.e. public and private) in which the eggs were stored;
- (3) whether it knows the number of patients who had retrieved frozen eggs stored in Hong Kong in the past three years; if it has not kept the relevant data, whether it has plans to compile statistics expeditiously;
- (4) whether it has compiled statistics on the respective numbers of specialists in reproductive science serving in the public healthcare system and private healthcare institutions in each of the past five years;
- (5) given the rising number of people using assisted reproduction services in recent years, whether the authorities have plans to increase the training opportunities for specialists in reproductive science in the public healthcare system; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (6) given that during the debate on the Member's motion on "Policies on supporting assisted reproduction" in this Council on June 20 this year, the Secretary for Health indicated that, last year, only 50 patients used their frozen-thawed eggs and only seven eventually established an ongoing pregnancy, reflecting that egg freezing may not increase the fertility rate, but there are views that the growth in fertility brought about by the increase in egg freezing may not be reflected in the short term and, coupled with the fact that some people would retrieve frozen eggs for use outside Hong Kong, the figures on the use of frozen-thawed eggs locally may not reflect the full situation, whether it has studied how the increase in egg freezing in recent years will affect the fertility rate in the future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(7) as there are views pointing out that, in recent years, the egg freezing service has become industrialised in various places of the world and outsiders can be attracted to use it, whether the authorities have plans to develop and promote in Hong Kong various types of assisted reproduction services including egg freezing?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Judy Chan is as follows:

The Government encourages the public to give birth in their best reproductive years and promotes fertility through an array of measures creating a conducive environment for childbearing, to alleviate the problem of ageing population. Couples facing medical difficulties in conceiving may use reproductive technology (RT) procedures to fulfil their wishes in childbearing. Unlike general medical procedures, RT procedures involve social, moral and ethical issues such as human life, family values, the rights of the service users and the welfare of the children born as a result of RT. Relevant policies, measures and matters must be fully considered and handled with caution.

Currently, RT procedures are regulated by the Human Reproductive Technology Ordinance (Cap. 561) (Ordinance). The Council on Human Reproductive Technology (CHRT) was established under the Ordinance with representatives from sectors such as medical, legal, social work, religious, philosophical or ethical education, psychology, and sociology to examine comprehensively and make decisions on various regulatory matters relating to RT. The Ordinance stipulates that healthcare institutions must hold licences issued by the CHRT to provide RT procedures. Currently, a total of 13 public and 23 private healthcare institutions have been licensed by the CHRT (including 18 artificial insemination by husband licences and 18 treatment licences). For details, please refer to Annex.

According to the Code of Practice on Reproductive Technology and Embryo Research (Code) made by the CHRT, the overall clinical responsibility for RT procedures should be held by a registered medical practitioner (RMP) with post-graduate qualifications recognised by the Hong Kong College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists or the College of Surgeons of Hong Kong and recognised as an accredited specialist in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G), Surgery or Reproductive Medicine (RM) under the Specialist Register kept by the Registrar of Medical Practitioners under the Medical Registration Ordinance (Cap. 161). According to the statistics of the CHRT, there are a total of 195 O&G, Surgery or RM specialists providing such services in licensed centres at present, with 107 and 88 in public and private licensed centres respectively. According to the information from the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, it is estimated that about 500 RMPs hold the relevant post-graduate qualifications recognised by the Hong Kong College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (including O&G and RM), and 100 RMPs hold the relevant post-graduate qualifications recognised by the College of Surgeons of Hong

Kong.

RM is a subspecialty of O&G. Upon completion of specialist training in O&G, doctors may undergo subspecialty training in the training hospitals (i.e. Queen Mary Hospital – Kwong Wah Hospital Joint Training Centre and Prince of Wales Hospital) for two to three years, during which they are required to complete a specified number of procedures and assessments before they can apply for certification as a specialist in RM under the Specialist Register. Based on the current caseload, the HA can train four doctors to obtain specialist qualifications in RM every two to three years. Among the specialists currently providing services in the licensed centres, 14 are specialists in RM on the Specialist Register, with one of them providing assisted reproductive services in the public sector and the other 13 in the private sector. Although there is no requirement in the Code that RT procedures must be performed by specialists in RM, in the HA, more advanced RT procedures (e.g. in-vitro fertilisation and frozen embryo transfer) are performed by doctors who have completed or are currently undergoing specialist training in RM. In 2024, 11 doctors possess relevant post-graduate qualifications and four doctors are undergoing specialist training in the HA. The Government does not have the relevant figures for the private sector.

The Government respects individuals' rights in life planning and therefore under prevailing regulations the public may choose to receive gamete freezing services for non-medical reasons. However, when using oocyte cryopreservation services, the public should be aware that relevant procedures are invasive medical procedures that involve multiple hormonal injections for ovarian stimulation, conscious sedation for oocyte retrieval, and insertion of a needle through the top of the vagina to retrieve oocytes from the ovaries. As with other surgical procedures, the entire oocyte cryopreservation procedure may result in various complications, including those related to ovarian stimulation, sedation, and oocyte retrieval procedures. It is the responsibility of the RMPs performing the relevant procedures to explain in detail the risks involved to the service recipient undergoing the procedures to ensure informed consent.

Medically, oocyte cryopreservation cannot fully reverse the physiological limitations in terms of age in childbearing. As women age, the risks associated with pregnancy and delivery for both the fetus and the woman increase, while the success rate of pregnancy decreases. According to the statistics of the CHRT in 2023, the success rate of in-vitro fertilisation treatment with fresh embryos for women aged 26 to 30 in achieving an ongoing pregnancy was about 50 per cent; for women aged 40 to 45, the success rate was reduced to 8 per cent. The above shows that it is a natural phenomenon that women's fertility decreases significantly with age, and RT can only assist but not reverse this situation.

The statistics of the CHRT shows that the number of frozen oocytes stored in licensed centres has been on the rise in recent years. As of the end of 2023, 20 375 oocytes are stored in the licensed centres, with 5 983 oocytes newly stored within 2023. In the meantime, the total number of people who have exported frozen oocytes outside Hong Kong from licensed centres between 2021 and 2023 is 90. The number of people using fresh embryos created

from frozen oocytes in public and private licensed centres, ongoing pregnancies and live birth events in the same period are tabulated below:

Year	Number of people using fresh embryos created from frozen oocytes in public licensed centres	Number of people using fresh embryos created from frozen oocytes in private licensed centres	Number of ongoing pregnancies	Number of live birth events
2023	2	48	7	N/A (Note 1)
2022	6	55	7	5
2021	1	43	6	5

Note 1: Licensed centres are required to report the details concerning the outcome of pregnancy within 12 months after treatment. Information on live birth for treatment cycles carried out in the later part of 2023 is not yet available.

The above data shows that the utilisation rate of frozen oocytes is very low, and there is no indication that oocyte cryopreservation service for non-medical reasons can have a substantial impact on the fertility rate. International studies have also had similar findings. A recent systematic review (Note 2) covering more than 13 000 individuals who had frozen their oocytes for non-medical reasons in different countries and regions (including 27 relevant studies with a median follow-up time of 7 years since oocyte retrieval) showed that only about 10 per cent of them used their frozen oocytes, and among them, only less than one-third successfully gave birth.

Based on the above considerations and factors, from the health policy perspective, the Government does not encourage undergoing invasive medical procedures with associated risks, and procedures that might delay childbearing decisions and cause one to miss the best reproductive years without medical reasons. However, the Government is aware that there are calls for an extension of the maximum gamete storage period to allow greater flexibility in life planning. As the relevant policy involves medical, legal, ethical and moral considerations, the CHRT and its Ethics Committee will convene a meeting in the first quarter of 2025 to discuss the relevant issues. The CHRT will carefully consider the views of various parties from different aspects, before making appropriate recommendations to the Health Bureau. The Government will thoroughly consider the recommendations made by the CHRT before deciding on the way forward.

Note 2: Reference: Kirubarajan A, Patel P, Thangavelu N, Salim S, Sadeghi Y, Yeretsian T, Sierra S. Return rates and pregnancy outcomes after oocyte preservation for planned fertility delay: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Fertil Steril*. 2024 Nov;122(5):902-917. doi:

[LCQ4: Using false information for applying for entry to Hong Kong](#)

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Chan Wing-kwong and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

It has been reported that some unscrupulous and unlawful intermediaries on the Mainland have been soliciting businesses by spreading rumours on social media platforms about various talent admission schemes of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, going as far as falsifying academic qualifications and proofs of employment for clients to facilitate their applications for study or employment in Hong Kong or visa renewal, so as to reap a profit. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of cases involving the use of false information by applicants applying for entry to Hong Kong for employment or renewal of employment visas under various talent admission schemes in the past three years, as well as the types of applications involved and the follow-up actions taken in respect of such cases; the relevant figures on applications for study in Hong Kong which involved the use of false information and the follow-up actions taken;

(2) of the measures in place to prevent the use of false information by applicants for entry to Hong Kong under various talent admission schemes; and

(3) whether it will step up co-operation with the relevant Mainland authorities to combat the illegal acts of unlawful intermediaries; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

The continuous development of Hong Kong requires adequate human resources. The current-term Government has actively launched a number of measures to trawl for talents, including the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS), and has also enhanced various talent admission schemes, including the Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates. to expand the local talent pool. The Government attaches great importance to the problem of lawbreakers

attempting to apply for study or employment in Hong Kong by falsifying academic qualifications or proofs of employment. All relevant bureaux and departments are performing their respective duties and actively handling relevant matters, and will continue to strictly enforce the law.

The Immigration Department (ImmD) has put in place mechanisms for assessing each visa or entry permit application under the talent admission schemes in a rigorous manner. It is an offence for any person or company to furnish false information or make false representation to the ImmD in visa or entry permit applications. Offenders are liable on conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and imprisonment for 14 years. Any person who makes, uses or possesses false instruments or copies of false instruments commits an offence, and is liable on conviction to a maximum penalty of imprisonment for 14 years. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties.

In addition, should any person be unveiled for obtaining his visa or entry permit to Hong Kong by illegal means, the visa or entry permit so obtained will become null and void according to the law, and the person will be subject to removal back to his place of origin. Even if the person has obtained the right of abode in Hong Kong, it will be declared invalid according to the law, and he will be subject to removal back to his place of origin.

In view of the situation of unscrupulous intermediary agencies falsifying academic qualifications, the Education Bureau (EDB) has requested post-secondary institutions to adopt enhancement measures, such as requiring applicants to submit verification proof by third-party authorities before admission as the circumstances may require, so as to further ensure the authenticity of the academic qualifications obtained. Various post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong have made it clear that they have not granted any intermediary agencies for overseas studies any degree of authority for admission. They have also reminded, from time to time, persons who intend to study in Hong Kong not to easily and blindly believe in the agencies' claim of so-called "guaranteed admission", and reiterated that furnishing false information is a serious criminal offense in Hong Kong. Relevant institutions will diligently undertake their gatekeeping responsibilities and clearly demonstrate their zero tolerance stance against falsifying or furnishing fraudulent academic qualifications. Upon discovery of any violations, post-secondary institutions will take immediate and decisive disciplinary actions, including rescission of admission offers or expulsion, and refer such cases to law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for follow-up action as appropriate.

In consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the EDB, the ImmD and the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), my reply to the question raised by Professor the Hon Chan Wing-kwong is as follows:

(1) The ImmD has been assessing each application for student visa or visa to Hong Kong under the talent admission schemes in a rigorous manner. LEAs will conduct thorough investigations and take resolute enforcement actions against suspected cases involving furnishing fraudulent academic qualifications or other false proofs. From January 2022 to December 2024, 25 persons were

arrested on suspicion of using fraudulent academic qualifications to enrol in local post-secondary institutions. Eight persons have been charged, three of whom have been convicted and five have been released on bail pending trial. The cases of the other 17 persons are under investigation. Among the convicted persons, the highest sentence was imprisonment for 17 weeks. The ImmD has declared the visas or entry permits of these convicted persons invalid according to the law.

(2) When processing each visa or entry permit application to Hong Kong, the ImmD will conduct random checks and verification on the information and documents submitted by the applicant as necessary, including verifying the applicant's status with the organisation that issued the document. The ImmD will also conduct surprise inspections from time to time, including on-site verifications against the employing company on the operating model, financial status and employee information, so as to determine the authenticity of the information provided by the applicant or his employing company when applying for a visa or entry permit and extension of stay.

On the other hand, the ImmD has completed a comprehensive review on the relevant visa policy. Apart from stepping up random checks on general employment visa applications, the ImmD requires all applicants of Categories B and C under the TTPS and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme to submit verification proof of academic qualifications issued by designated third-party credential verification organisations or the awarding institutions. The updated requirements are clearly set out on the ImmD's website.

The ImmD has also actively publicised to the public and intermediary agencies, through various channels such as the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices, press releases, social media and talks, that furnishing false information or making false representations to the ImmD are serious criminal offences punishable by imprisonment. The public has been urged not to defy the law. The Government constantly reminds those who are interested to come to Hong Kong for employment or establishing businesses that they do not need to apply through intermediaries. They are also advised not to easily and blindly believe in claims made by intermediaries, such as the so-called "guaranteed success in application". Applicants are reminded that it is a serious criminal offence to provide false information and offenders are liable to criminal sanctions.

(3) The above relevant bureaux and departments have been maintaining close communication with the relevant Mainland authorities.

The HKPF has been working closely with the relevant Mainland enforcement authorities in timely referral of information of Mainland intermediary agencies involving in cases of fraudulent academic qualifications in Hong Kong to the relevant Mainland authorities for follow-up. As at December 2024, the HKPF had referred information of a total of 14 suspected unscrupulous Mainland intermediary agencies or intermediaries to the relevant Mainland authorities for follow-up.

The ImmD and the relevant Mainland authorities have established

communication mechanism and maintained close intelligence exchanges and co-operations. In respect of the recent cases involving false proofs and unscrupulous intermediaries, the ImmD has been maintaining close communication and exchanging intelligence with the relevant Mainland authorities.

The Mainland and Hong Kong will conduct joint enforcement action against relevant illegal acts in a timely manner.

[CHP investigates food poisoning cluster](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 18) investigating a food poisoning cluster affecting 15 persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene when travelling outside Hong Kong to prevent foodborne diseases.

The cluster involved five males and 10 females aged between 57 and 94, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and fever after eating at two restaurants in Zhanjiang during a group tour to Guangdong between December 13 and 15.

Fourteen of the affected persons sought medical advice either on the Mainland or in Hong Kong. Two sought medical advice when they returned to Hong Kong while one required hospitalisation and was discharged after treatment.

Initial investigations by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed common food including oysters, abalone, shrimp, sea cucumber and fish. The incident might have been caused by norovirus or *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*.

The CHP has forwarded the case details to the Mainland health authorities and is appealing to those who participated in the three-day tour to Zhanjiang, Taishan and Jiangmen organised by E King Travel (International) Limited between December 13 and 15 to call the CHP hotline (2125 2670) for follow up and medical surveillance. The hotline will operate from tomorrow (December 19) until December 24 from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. They should seek medical advice immediately if they develop symptoms of infection, such as fever or feeling unwell.

To prevent foodborne diseases, members of the public are reminded to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times. When dining out, one should:

- Avoid eating raw seafood;
 - Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters at a buffet;
 - Choose pasteurised eggs, egg products or dried egg powder for dishes that often use lightly cooked or uncooked eggs;
 - Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
 - Store and reheat pre-cooked or leftover foods properly before consumption;
 - Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hotpot or barbecue meal;
 - Handle raw and cooked foods carefully and separate them completely during the cooking process;
 - Use two sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked foods;
 - Avoid patronising illegal food hawkers;
 - Drink boiled water;
 - Refrain from trying to use salt, vinegar, wine or wasabi to kill bacteria as they are not effective; and
 - Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.
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[Working Group on Promoting Gold Market Development established](#)

Following the Chief Executive's announcement in the 2024 Policy Address to establish a working group under the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau to comprehensively review all aspects relating to the development of a gold market, take forward the establishment of an international gold trading centre, and formulate plans on enhancing the trading and regulatory mechanisms of the market, conducting domestic and overseas promotion, etc, the Government announced today (December 18) that the Working Group on Promoting Gold Market Development has been established.

The Working Group is chaired by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury. Members comprise relevant government officials, representatives of regulatory bodies, financial institutions, exchanges and industry stakeholders. The Working Group will also invite other industry experts to participate in discussions on specific issues.

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui said, "The establishment of an international gold trading centre is a new entry point to consolidate and enhance Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre. In this year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive stated that we would attract physical gold storage, drive gold trading, settlement and delivery activities, and even propel Hong Kong into being a gold trading centre. The Government will promote the development of world-class gold storage facilities, and building on the increased gold

holdings, scale up associated support and financial services such as insurance, testing and certification, logistics, etc, as well as expanding related derivative transactions such as collateral, loans and hedging, etc, hence creating a comprehensive ecosystem in a progressive manner. This will promote a comprehensive multicurrency trading, clearing, delivery, and regulatory system, thereby establishing a holistic gold trading centre. We will also explore mutual access with the Mainland financial market when appropriate."

He added, "The Working Group, which brings together industry leaders and professionals, as well as representatives of financial regulators and market participants, will hold its first meeting this month. I look forward to working closely and actively discussing with members on formulating a comprehensive implementation plan for the development of Hong Kong's gold market."

The membership of the Working Group is as follows:

Chairperson

Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury

Non-official members

Ms Peggy Chang

Dr Haywood Cheung

Mr Andrew Fung Hau-chung

Mr Robert Lee Wai-wang

Mr Lv Haitao

Mr Ma Manfu

Mr Tse Moon-chuen

Mr Kent Wong Siu-kee

Mrs Sally Wong Chi-ming

Mr Xu Lei

Ms Zhang Qiaochun

Ms Zhu Jing

Official members

Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Financial Services)

Representative of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority

Representative of the Securities and Futures Commission

Representative of Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited

Import of poultry meat and products from District of Stade of State of Niedersachsen in Germany suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 18) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in the District of Stade of the State of Niedersachsen in Germany, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the area with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 800 tonnes of frozen poultry meat from Germany in the first nine months of this year.

"The CFS has contacted the German authority over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the WOAH and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreak. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.