

HKSAR Government strongly condemns and rejects UK six-monthly report on Hong Kong

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) strongly disapproved of and rejected the untruthful remarks, slanders and smears against various aspects of the HKSAR in the so-called six-monthly report on Hong Kong: July to December 2023 of the United Kingdom (UK) on April 15.

A spokesman for the HKSAR Government said, "The HKSAR Government strongly condemns and rejects the wanton slander and political attacks in the UK's so-called six-monthly report where the 'one country, two systems' principle is successfully implemented. The HKSAR is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China, and as a local administrative region that enjoys a high degree of autonomy under the principle of 'one country, two systems', comes directly under the jurisdiction of the Central People's Government. The core essence of the Sino-British Joint Declaration is about China's resumption of the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong. It did not authorise the UK to interfere in Hong Kong's affairs after its return to the motherland. The UK has no sovereignty, jurisdiction or right of supervision over Hong Kong after its return to the motherland. The UK once again made skewed remarks about Hong Kong by replacing the rule of law with political manipulation and confounding right and wrong, and blatantly interfering in Hong Kong affairs which are entirely China's internal affairs. The UK's attempt to undermine the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong is doomed to fail."

The spokesman reiterated, "The HKSAR Government steadfastly safeguards national sovereignty, security and development interests, and fully and faithfully lives up to the highest principle of 'one country, two systems'. It will resolutely, fully and faithfully implement the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL), the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance and other relevant laws safeguarding national security in the HKSAR, to effectively prevent, suppress and impose punishment for acts and activities endangering national security in accordance with the law, whilst maintaining the common law system, adhering to the principle of the rule of law and upholding the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong people in accordance with the law, so as to ensure the steadfast and successful implementation of the principle of 'one country, two systems'. The HKSAR Government strongly demands the UK to immediately stop acting against the international law and basic norms of international relations and interfering in China's internal affairs and Hong Kong affairs."

Improved Electoral System and Reform of District Councils

The HKSAR Government spokesman pointed out, "The remarks in the UK's so-called six-monthly report about the improved Hong Kong's electoral system and

the 2023 District Council (DC) Ordinary Election is utterly untrue. The improved electoral system of the HKSAR puts in place legal safeguards to ensure the full implementation of 'patriots administering Hong Kong'. Keeping political power in the hands of patriots is a political rule commonly adopted around the world. No one country or region in the world will ever allow political power to fall into the hands of forces or individuals who do not love, or even sell out or betray, their own country. In Hong Kong, regardless of one's background, whoever meets the requirements and criteria of patriots can participate in elections in accordance with the law and serve the Hong Kong public by entering into the governance structure of the HKSAR after getting successfully elected.

"The HKSAR Government strongly refutes the fallacious descriptions about the reform of DCs in the UK's so-called six-monthly report. The chaos of the earlier term DCs is well known to everyone in Hong Kong and abhorred. Putting DCs back to the right track and reforming them is therefore necessary and imperative. Reforming DCs is an important part of improving district governance. Having a variety of methods for the formation of DCs enables persons who love the country, have an affection for Hong Kong and are dedicated to serving their districts can participate in the work of DCs through a variety of channels, thereby reflecting public opinion more comprehensively and accurately.

"The 2023 DC Ordinary Election held on December 10, 2023 was the first large-scale territory-wide election under the improved district governance structure and the reformed DCs. The election is of great significance in terms of returning the DCs to their rightful positioning under Article 97 of the Basic Law as advisory and service bodies that are not organs of political power, and in terms of fully implementing the principle of 'patriots administering Hong Kong'. This was a high-quality election conducted in a fair, just, clean, safe and orderly manner, demonstrating fully an election culture of excellence and the superiority of the reformed DCs."

Laws Safeguarding National Security

The HKSAR Government spokesman said, "The HKSAR Government strongly opposes the absurd and false contents in the UK's so-called six-monthly report with regard to the laws safeguarding national security in the HKSAR. Since the implementation of the NSL in June 2020, the UK has turned a blind eye to the large-scale and incessant riots which occurred in 2019 and devastated the society, livelihood and economy of Hong Kong. Instead, it repeatedly exploits different incidents and occasions, as well as creating excuses, to maliciously slander the laws safeguarding national security in the HKSAR, and blatantly attack the HKSAR in safeguarding national security dutifully, faithfully and in accordance with the law. The UK has also deliberately neglected the fact that such laws have enabled the livelihood and economic activities of the Hong Kong community, and as well the business environment, to return to normalcy. Its bullying act and hypocrisy with double standards are utterly ugly and despicable.

"The HKSAR law enforcement agencies have been taking law enforcement actions based on evidence and strictly in accordance with the law in respect

of the acts of the persons or entities concerned, paying no regard to their political stance, background or occupation. The suggestion that certain individuals or organisations should be immune from legal consequences for their illegal acts, including those involving collusion with foreign or external forces, is no different from advocating a special pass to break the law, and this totally runs contrary to the spirit of the rule of law.

"As regards the sedition offence, the courts of the HKSAR have ruled in different cases that the provisions relating to sedition are consistent with the relevant provisions of the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights on the protection of human rights, and that a proportionate and reasonable balance has been struck between safeguarding national security and protection of the freedom of speech. The offence is not meant to silence expression of any opinion that is only genuine criticisms against the Government based on objective facts.

"The NSL has extraterritorial effect. The Police have the responsibility to pursue those who are suspected of committing offences under the NSL outside Hong Kong. The persons who have been put on the wanted list have fled overseas and are suspected of continuing to commit offences under the NSL. Their malicious acts to endanger national security have been seen through by all, and there is no doubt that they have clearly and seriously endangered national security. As the law enforcement department of the HKSAR safeguarding national security, the Police are duty bound to put the persons concerned on the wanted list in accordance with the law and the action is fully justified. The extraterritorial effect for the laws safeguarding national security in the HKSAR fully aligns with the principles of international law, international practice and common practice adopted in various countries and regions, including the UK. It is both necessary and legitimate, and is also in line with those of other countries and regions around the world.

"As guaranteed by the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights, all defendants charged with a criminal offence shall have the right to a fair trial by the judiciary exercising independent judicial power. The courts of the HKSAR shall exercise judicial power independently, free from any interference. It is extremely inappropriate for the UK to make unwarranted comments on criminal trials which are ongoing in the HKSAR courts. It is also a complete disregard to the spirit of the rule of law.

"Every state will enact laws on safeguarding national security. This is an inherent right of every sovereign state, and is also an international practice. Last year, the UK passed the National Security Act 2023, which has introduced various offences including modernised espionage offences and offence of foreign interference with extraterritorial effect, created a foreign activities and foreign influence registration scheme, and granted the law enforcement authorities a wide range of powers to take prevention and investigation measures. The UK has no right and no qualification to make scandalous accusations against the measures taken by the Central Authorities and the HKSAR Government to safeguard national security when it just does the very same thing. Not only are those remarks by the UK totally distorting and confounding right and wrong, but they also entirely disregard the

constitutional duty and practical needs of the HKSAR to legislate, and the positive effects brought by the enactment of the relevant national security legislation on economic development and protection of human rights.

"In addition, the HKSAR's legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law has strong popular support. The Bills Committee, together with the subcommittee earlier set up by the House Committee to study matters relating to Basic Law Article 23 legislation, convened 25 meetings in total, and devoted nearly 50 hours to scrutinise every clause of the Bill in detail.

"As repeatedly stressed by the HKSAR Government, the laws safeguarding national security in the HKSAR are precisely for safeguarding national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity; and ensuring the full and faithful implementation of the principle of 'one country, two systems' under which the people of Hong Kong administer Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy. It will also better safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of the residents of the HKSAR and other people in the city, including those doing business in Hong Kong. The UK must immediately act reasonably and sensibly, and stop making malicious attacks on the laws safeguarding national security in the HKSAR."

Safeguarding Due Administration of Justice and Rule of Law

The HKSAR Government spokesman pointed out, "The HKSAR Government safeguards independent judicial power and fully supports the Judiciary in exercising its judicial power independently, safeguarding the due administration of justice and the rule of law. Articles 2, 19 and 85 of the Basic Law specifically provide that the HKSAR enjoys independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication, and the courts of the HKSAR shall exercise judicial power independently, free from any interference. Article 92 of the Basic Law also clearly stipulates that judges and other members of the judiciary of the HKSAR shall be chosen on the basis of their judicial and professional qualities. All judges and judicial officers are appointed by the Chief Executive on the recommendation of an independent commission composed of local judges, persons from the legal profession and eminent persons from other sectors. All judges and judicial officers so appointed will continue to abide by the Judicial Oath and administer justice in full accordance with the law, without fear or favour, self-interest or deceit. Establishing the mechanism for safeguarding national security in the HKSAR will not undermine the independent judicial power. Our judicial system continues to be protected by the Basic Law. When adjudicating cases concerning offence endangering national security, as in any other cases, judges remain independent and impartial in performing their judicial duties, free from any interference.

"The Department of Justice takes charge of criminal prosecutions, free from any interference by virtue of Article 63 of the Basic Law. All prosecutorial decisions are based on an objective analysis of all admissible evidence and applicable laws.

"The Judiciary exercises judicial power independently in accordance with the law, and everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to a fair

hearing. The courts decide cases strictly in accordance with the evidence and all applicable laws. Cases will never be handled any differently owing to the profession, political beliefs or background of the persons involved. The prosecution has the burden to prove beyond reasonable doubt the commission of an offence before a defendant may be convicted by the court.

"The right to choice of lawyers is protected by the Basic Law, and it is well-established by case law that such a choice means a right to choose lawyers who are available and entitled to practise in Hong Kong, and not overseas lawyers who are not qualified to practise. As a matter of fact, in the UK, there is simply no regime for ad hoc admission of overseas lawyers similar to that in Hong Kong, not to mention any regime which allows overseas lawyers who are not qualified to practise generally there to handle national security cases. The amendment to the Legal Practitioners Ordinance (Cap. 159) was introduced by the Government in 2023 with a view to addressing the potential national security risks associated with the participation in national security cases by overseas lawyers who are not qualified to practise generally in Hong Kong, and implementing the interpretation by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of Articles 14 and 47 of the NSL. The UK's slander which accused that the relevant ordinance restricted the right to choice of lawyers is not only hypocrisy, but also manifestly without a sound legal basis."

Safeguarding Rights and Freedoms

The HKSAR Government spokesman said, "The HKSAR Government steadfastly safeguards the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong people as protected under the law. Since Hong Kong's return to the motherland, human rights in the city have always been robustly guaranteed constitutionally by both the Constitution and the Basic Law. The NSL and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance also clearly stipulate that human rights shall be respected and protected in safeguarding national security in the HKSAR, and that the rights and freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, of the press, of publication, of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration, that Hong Kong residents enjoy under the Basic Law and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as applied to Hong Kong, shall be protected in accordance with the law. Nonetheless, just as the case with other places in the world, such rights and freedoms are not absolute. The ICCPR also expressly states that some of them may be subject to restrictions as prescribed by law that are necessary for protection of national security, public safety, public order or the rights and freedoms of others, etc."

"In fact, since the implementation of the NSL, the media landscape in Hong Kong has remained vibrant. As always, the media can exercise their freedom of the press in accordance with the law. The media continue to enjoy the freedom to comment on and criticise government policies without any restriction, as long as this is not in violation of the law."

Enhancing National Education

The HKSAR Government spokesman pointed out, "Schools are places for students to learn and grow. It is the obligation of schools to provide a safe and orderly school environment and atmosphere, and to maintain a campus free from political interference or illegal activities. National education has been an important part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools, for cultivating our students into a quality new generation. Teachers are also role models of their students. The HKSAR Government has the responsibility to ensure the professional conduct of teachers. Implementation of national education, including national security education, is the legitimate duty of education authorities all over the world. Different places attach great importance to implementing national security education and developing their students' sense of national identity, including knowledge of their respective constitution, their own history, culture, geography, etc.

"Academic freedom is an important social value treasured in Hong Kong and the cornerstone of our higher education sector. Since the implementation of the NSL, academics or post-secondary education institutions in Hong Kong continue to conduct normal exchange activities between their foreign or external counterparts. Meanwhile, post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong have taken a series of measures to incorporate national security education into students' learning in fulfilment of their statutory duty. These institutions enjoy autonomy on curriculum design, and the HKSAR Government encourages the institutions to provide students with diversified learning opportunities on national security education."

HKSAR organises activities for 2024 National Security Education Day (with videos)

â€‹The following is issued on behalf of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region:

Launched today (April 15) at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the 2024 National Security Education Day activities were hosted by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the National Security Committee) and supported by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (LOCPG) and the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (OSNS). The Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council Mr Xia Baolong, together with the leading officials of his office in Beijing, attended the opening ceremony of the National Security Education Day via video link. Officiating guests

attending the launching ceremony were Director Xia Baolong; the Chief Executive of the HKSAR and the Chairman of the National Security Committee, Mr John Lee; Director of LOCPG and National Security Advisor of the National Security Committee, Mr Zheng Yanxiong; Head of OSNS, Mr Dong Jingwei; Acting Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Li Yongsheng; and Deputy Political Commissar of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison, Major General Wang Zhaobing.

In his keynote speech delivered via video link at the opening ceremony, Director Xia Baolong said that on March 19, the Hong Kong Legislative Council unanimously passed the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance. On March 23, the Ordinance took effect by publication in the Gazette. It was a significant milestone in the implementation of "one country, two systems", signifying that Hong Kong had further strengthened the legal defence in safeguarding national security. Today, with the protection offered by national security legislation and the full implementation of the "patriots administering Hong Kong" principle, Hong Kong has bid farewell to the era of instability, and welcomes the best time to get fully focused on pursuing economic growth and advancing development. Director Xia pointed out that to realise the transition "from stability to prosperity", the HKSAR must meet five needs: (1) the need to firmly safeguard the bottom line for national security so as to provide the necessary condition for promoting high-quality development; (2) the need to steadfastly implement "one country, two systems", giving full play to the fundamental safeguard provided by the principle in maintaining Hong Kong's prosperity and stability; (3) the need to consolidate and make the best use of Hong Kong's unique position and advantages, and further shaping such unique role and advantages; (4) the need to better integrate into the national development to bring continuous impetus and more business opportunities to Hong Kong; and (5) the need to proactively adapt to new situation and new challenges, embrace new responsibilities, so as to break new grounds and achieve new leap forward in the course of positive actions, innovations and creations. The realisation of the transition "from stability to prosperity" is the common enterprise of the whole community of Hong Kong. The citizens will surely adhere to the "Lion Rock spirit" to pioneer and explore, to confront changes with flexibility, to strive, to persevere and to move forward, to continue to create a new legend of development for Hong Kong and a brighter future together. With the strong backing of the Motherland and efforts by all people of Hong Kong, Hong Kong will have a bright prospect en route "from stability to prosperity". The train of "Hong Kong" in the new era will advance unhindered.

Mr Lee said, "The inspiring keynote speech by Director Xia has pointed to the direction for Hong Kong to realise the transition 'from stability to prosperity'. I am sincerely grateful to Director Xia for the care, guidance and support he has given Hong Kong all along. As Director Xia said, the realisation of the transition 'from stability to prosperity' is the common enterprise of the whole community of Hong Kong. We will definitely adhere to the 'Lion Rock spirit' to better implement this mission solidly, and to continue to create a new legend of Hong Kong development."

In his keynote speech at the opening ceremony, Mr Lee said although Hong Kong had completed the legislation under Article 23 of the Basic Law and injected an effective vaccine to safeguard national security, threats of national security which are like viruses would still attack us. Therefore, the HKSAR Government will implement the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance in four areas. These include making continuous efforts to brief the community; reviewing and strengthening internal systems; sparing no effort in enhancing the executive capability on preventing, suppressing and imposing punishment for national security offences; and strengthening national security education. Following the enactment of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance on March 23, Hong Kong has put up a shield and strengthened the defence wall of national security. As the HKSAR transits "from stability to prosperity", it will focus its efforts on pursuing economic growth, advancing development, improving people's livelihood and bringing fulfillment to the people. The HKSAR Government will strengthen five major areas of work: (1) to forge a better integration of a capable government and an efficient market, to pursue more results, develop the economy and improve people's livelihood; (2) to seize the opportunities brought about by our country's policy of developing new quality productive forces; (3) to develop Hong Kong as a talent hub; (4) to capitalise on Hong Kong's distinctive advantages of enjoying strong support of the Motherland and being closely connected to the world, and to create unlimited opportunities for Hong Kong; and (5) to develop the domestic economy, including boosting tourism, consumption and investment, and to continue to support the continuing development of small-and-medium sized enterprises.

In his speech, Director Zheng pointed out that the Hong Kong National Security Law and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, as well as the National Security Committee and the OSNS are the "dual legislation and dual enforcement mechanism" indispensable for the rule of law system in Hong Kong. The "dual legislation and dual enforcement mechanism" will exercise central jurisdiction and fulfil the HKSAR's responsibility effectively, functioning as a double insurance to safeguard national security comprehensively. Director Zheng stressed that the HKSAR must steadfastly safeguard the long-term implementation of "one country, two systems", firmly co-ordinate high-level security and high-quality development, firmly resolve problems at root and strengthen nationalism and patriotism, resolutely and decisively seize the opportunities to create a bright future for Hong Kong development and firmly support the Chief Executive and the governing team of the HKSAR in shouldering the constitutional responsibility.

Director Dong shared four points in his speech: (1) the implementation of a "holistic approach to national security" has yielded fruitful results; (2) safeguarding national security in Hong Kong is a continuous endeavor with no end point; (3) for Hong Kong to realise the transition "from stability to prosperity", high-quality development must go hand in hand with high-level security safeguard; and (4) safeguarding national security according to the law is a pre-requisite for the faithful implementation of a "holistic approach to national security". Director Dong said the OSNS would work with the HKSAR to fully and faithfully implement the Hong Kong National Security Law and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance.

Acting Commissioner Li pointed out that Chinese diplomacy firmly adhered to the requirements under a "holistic approach to national security" by safeguarding our country's security and international common security simultaneously, participating in improving global security governance actively, and tackling various security risks and challenges together with other countries. The Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR fully and faithfully implements the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy and the Central Authorities' strategy of governing Hong Kong, and strives for three "insistence": (1) insistence on protecting Hong Kong through diplomacy by halting any interference of Hong Kong's affairs by external forces; (2) insistence on benefiting Hong Kong through diplomacy by strongly supporting Hong Kong to extend interaction and co-operation with external jurisdictions; (3) insistence on diplomacy for the people by safeguarding the legitimate interests of Hong Kong compatriots overseas.

Major General Wang said that national security is the top priority. It is a blessing for the people to enjoy peace; it is the responsibility of the people's army to defend peace. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) always stays true to the original mission and entrusted responsibilities, guarding the Pearl of the Orient faithfully. As Hong Kong transits "from chaos to stability" and "from stability to prosperity", the PLA Hong Kong Garrison will firmly and faithfully implement the strategic decisions of the Central Authorities, Central Military Commission of the PRC and President Xi Jinping. The Garrison will strengthen its military preparedness to safeguard sovereign security and Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability with enhanced capability, and contribute to the long-term implementation and development of "one country, two systems".

The theme of the 2024 HKSAR National Security Education Day is "10th Anniversary of a holistic approach to national security". This year's events have many new elements: for the first time, the Government and a private foundation jointly organised a 5-month programme called "National Security Knowledge Challenge for All Schools in Hong Kong", which was participated by more than 100 000 primary and secondary school students for deepening their understanding of national security; the first "National Security Education Study Tour" which took 75 teachers and students from 17 secondary schools to Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou to experience and appreciate first-hand the importance of different fields of national security and the significance of "national security as the bedrock for Hong Kong's security, home security and people's security". For the first time, a new animation titled "Young Guardians of National Security" was produced, conveying the importance of knowing the law, abiding by the law, and safeguarding national security through a child's perspective and the latter's observation and interactions in the insect world. Also for the first time, numerous government policy bureaux and departments as well as youth uniform groups held different activities at the same time to enhance understanding of national security, and the first brochure titled "A Holistic Approach to National Security" with elaboration on 20 security fields was launched to deepen citizens' understanding of this important subject.

Apart from the above, the disciplined services held a solemn and grand flag-raising ceremony on April 15, and "National Security Cup" sports events and open days before April 15. In addition, 18 District Councils have organised different events, including seminars, carnivals, competitions, lectures, etc., to allow Hong Kong citizens to participate in and understand national security.

The National Security Law of the People's Republic of China stipulates that April 15 of each year is the National Security Education Day. The aim of National Security Education Day is to raise citizens' awareness of safeguarding national security and help them appreciate that everyone has a responsibility for national security and should fulfil such responsibility.

Government responds to recent reports on seasonal influenza vaccines options

A spokesman for the Department of Health (DH) today (April 15) said that the Government has all along been committed in encouraging members of the public to receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV). Currently, over 1.8 million doses of SIV had been administered under various Government SIV programmes, representing an increase of 20 per cent comparing with the same period last year. For children aged between 6 months and below 18 years of age, about 533 700 doses of SIV have been administered reaching a record high and an increase of about 36.8 per cent comparing to last year. This remarkable record was attributed to the collaborative efforts of different parties. In view of the recent reports on nasal vaccines usage, the DH stressed that annual survey has been conducting to gather feedback from enrolled doctors and schools in the school outreach programmes so as to make reference to the preference of participating schools when procuring vaccines.

Arrangement and limitation of live attenuated influenza vaccine (i.e. nasal vaccine) (LAIV)

According to recommendations of the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) under the Centre for Health Protection of the DH, overseas research and clinical experience generally showed that both injectable inactivated influenza vaccines (IIV) and nasal LAIV are safe and both vaccines can offer comparable protection to the receivers. There is no scientific evidence supporting the priority use of nasal LAIV thus far.

In order to increase the SIV rate of the public (including school children), the DH has been implementing various vaccination schemes to provide free or subsidised SIV for eligible persons. According to the current arrangement under the SIV School Outreach (Free of Charge) Programme, kindergarten and child care centres can choose to receive injectable IIV or nasal LAIV, while primary schools and secondary schools can arrange

injectable IIV.

According to the findings of the latest survey conducted in 2023 against schools and doctors participating in the school outreach programmes, only 26 per cent of kindergartens and child care centres chose to use nasal LAIV. Sufficient vaccines have been provided to those kindergartens and child care centres which chose nasal LAIV.

Also, kindergarten, child care centres, primary and secondary schools can discuss with outreach doctors on the provision of injectable IIV or nasal LAIV during the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed) activities. Parents can also arrange subsidised SIV at clinics of private doctors under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) for children and adolescents aged six months to less than 18 years. Private doctors enrolled in the VSS can also decide to use injectable IIV or nasal LAIV. According to the above survey, only 9 per cent of primary schools and 7 per cent of secondary schools chose to use LAIV nasal spray. According to previous experience, schools and medical institutions participating in the outreach programme would make reference to parents' choices and side effects and contraindications of influenza vaccines to choose the vaccines provided in the outreach vaccination programme.

In the 2022/23 season, the Government procured 22 500 doses of nasal LAIV for various SIV programmes/schemes, of which 17 400 doses were administered for students. The remainder of around 5 100 doses were unused and disposed of, resulting in vaccine wastage of around 22.7 per cent, which was higher than the 13.1 percent vaccine wastage for IIVs.

The spokesman reiterated that persons suitable for receiving IIV and LAIV vaccine are different. There are more restrictions for receiving nasal spray vaccines with more points to note, and the shelf-life is also shorter. Nasal LAIV are not applicable to persons who are pregnant, immunocompromised or with other contraindications, e.g. children 2 years through 4 years who have asthma or who have had a history of wheezing in the past 12 months; and concomitant aspirin or salicylate-containing therapy in children and adolescents.

Historic high number of vaccination doses received by children in 2023/24

A total of over 1.8 million doses of SIV had been administered under various Government SIV programmes, representing a 20 per cent increase when comparing with the same period of last year. With the DH's publicity effort, the number of students receiving SIV in 2023/24 has significantly increased compared to last year. As at April 7, under the Government Vaccination Programme, about 533 700 doses of SIV have been administered for children aged between 6 months and below 18 years of age, reaching a record high and increased by about 36.8 per cent comparing to last year. The overall vaccine coverage rate has reached 52.5 per cent, which has marked an increase of 13 per cent for the same period last year.

The DH will continue to maintain close communication with stakeholders (including doctors and schools) to actively explore more options for SIV

vaccination arrangements. The DH will formulate the implementation details for the 2024/25 season, including the best mode of operation and types of vaccine to be provided, with reference to survey results against schools and doctors participating in the school outreach programmes of 2024, and latest recommendations and experience of SCVPD and health authorities of other areas.

[Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement to combat illicit cigarette peddling activities](#)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a large-scale special anti-illicit cigarette operation codenamed "Tempest" in February 19 to step up enforcement in combating illicit cigarette activities on all fronts at each control point and across various districts. During the operation, Customs not only cracked down on cross-boundary cigarette smuggling activities by interception in the upper stream and shut down storage and distribution centres in the middle, but also tackled peddling activities in the lower end. Today (April 15), Customs also conducted operations in Sham Shui Po and detected three illicit cigarette peddling cases.

Customs officers intercepted three suspicious men, aged 23, 59 and 67 respectively, in Sham Shui Po this afternoon and seized between 200 to 800 sticks of suspected illicit cigarettes on each of them. They all claimed the cigarettes were for personal use. The three arrested men were charged with "possession of goods to which the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance applies".

As of today, Customs has detected a total of 179 peddling cases of illicit cigarettes this year, with a total of about 150 000 suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$610,000 and a duty potential of about \$430,000, seized. A total of 179 individuals, including 160 men and 19 women, aged between 17 and 86, were arrested. Most of them are buyers of illicit cigarettes and there is a trend of young people being involved. Also, Customs found that more than half of the cases occurred in Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong, Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan districts. The number of illicit cigarettes seized from the arrested persons ranged from 100 to over 6 000 sticks, with the majority intended for personal use.

Customs stresses that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. Among the illicit cigarette cases in 2023, the court sentenced a maximum penalty of four months' imprisonment on individuals who purchased illegal cigarettes for personal use. Customs reminds members of the public, especially young people, to never become involved in illicit cigarette activities to avoid creating a criminal record that affects their future.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

CHP investigates outbreak of Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae at elderly home in Sai Wan

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (April 15) investigating an outbreak of Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE) at a residential care home for the elderly (RCHE) in Sai Wan, and reminded the public on maintaining strict personal and environmental hygiene, and proper use of antibiotics.

The outbreak involves one male and four female residents aged 58 to 86. Four of the residents were admitted to public hospitals for their underlying illnesses respectively during the period between April 5 and 9. Their rectal swabs taken on admission screening tested positive for CPE upon laboratory testing. The CHP conducted contact tracing and screening at the RCHE and found another carrier case involving a female resident aged 86. She was admitted to a public hospital for underlying illnesses on April 12 last year and her rectal swab taken on admission screening then tested positive for CPE. All patients remain asymptomatic and are in stable condition.

The CHP is continuing its investigation on the infection source of the outbreak and a site inspection has been conducted. It is found that the RCHE has yet to fully implement relevant infection control measures and thus the possibility of transmission in the RCHE is not ruled out. The CHP has advised the RCHE to adopt necessary infection control measures against CPE, including maintaining good environmental hygiene and hand hygiene for staff and residents. The RCHE has been put under medical surveillance.

The CHP's investigations are ongoing.

RCHEs are reminded to follow the [Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly](#) on detection, prevention and control of infections. If there is suspicion of an infectious

disease outbreak, the institution should report to the CHP promptly for follow-up.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Enterobacteriaceae (for example, E. coli and Klebsiella) are common pathogens that can cause infections at different body sites including urinary tract infections, intra-abdominal infections or bacteraemia. CPE are enterobacteriaceae that produce carbapenemase – an enzyme that can deactivate carbapenems and other beta-lactam antibiotics such as penicillins. These bacteria are commonly resistant to multiple antibiotics, limiting therapeutic options, and may render severe clinical infections difficult to treat. The range of diseases associated with CPE varies from asymptomatic carriage to potentially life-threatening or fatal infections. The level of risk depends on which part of the body is affected by the infection and the general health of the patient."

â€‹â€‹The spokesman added that proper use of antibiotics and maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene, especially hand hygiene, are important for the prevention of emergence and cross-transmission of multi-drug resistant organisms (MDROs) like CPE. In addition, susceptible individuals such as the elderly, infants and young children, pregnant women and people with weakened immunity can lower the risk of contracting MDROs by not eating raw or undercooked foods.