

Update on cases of Legionnaires' disease

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (April 15) reported the latest number of cases of Legionnaires' disease (LD), and stressed the importance of using and maintaining properly designed man-made water systems, adding that susceptible groups should strictly observe relevant precautions.

From April 7 to 13, the CHP recorded three community-acquired LD cases:

1. A male patient, aged 89 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Kowloon City District;
2. A male patient, aged 73 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Sai Kung District; and
3. A male patient, aged 65 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Sai Kung District.

"Epidemiological investigations are ongoing to identify potential sources of infection, high-risk exposure and clusters, if any," a spokesman for the CHP said.

As of April 13, 19 LD cases had been recorded this year. In 2023 and 2022, there were 121 and 80 cases respectively.

"Men, people aged over 50, smokers, alcoholics and persons with weakened immunity are more susceptible to LD. Some situations may also increase the risk of infection, including poor maintenance of water systems; living in areas with old water systems, cooling towers or fountains; using electric water heaters, whirlpools and spas or hot water spring spas; and recent stays in hotels or vessels," the spokesman said.

Legionellae are found in various environmental settings and grow well in warm water (20 to 45 degrees Celsius). They can be found in aqueous environments such as water tanks, hot and cold water systems, cooling towers, whirlpools and spas, water fountains and home apparatus that support breathing. People may become infected when they breathe in contaminated droplets (aerosols) and mist generated by artificial water systems, or when handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes.

Immunocompromised persons should:

- Use sterile or boiled water for drinking, tooth brushing and mouth rinsing;
- Avoid using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices; and
- If using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices, fill the water tank with only sterile or cooled freshly boiled water, and not

water directly from the tap. Also, clean and maintain humidifiers/devices regularly according to manufacturers' instructions. Never leave stagnant water in a humidifier/device. Empty the water tank, wipe all surfaces dry, and change the water daily.

â€‹The public should observe the health advice below:

- Observe personal hygiene;
- Do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption;
- Strainers in water taps and shower heads should be inspected, cleaned, descaled and disinfected regularly or at a frequency recommended by the manufacturer;
- If a fresh-water plumbing system is properly maintained, it is not necessary to install domestic water filters. Use of water filters is not encouraged as clogging occurs easily, which can promote growth of micro-organisms. In case water filters are used, the pore size should be 0.2 micrometres (μm) and the filter needs to be changed periodically according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Drain and clean water tanks of buildings at least quarterly;
- Drain or purge for at least one minute infrequently used water outlets (e.g. water taps, shower heads and hot water outlets) and stagnant points of the pipework weekly or before use;
- Seek and follow doctors' professional advice regarding the use and maintenance of home respiratory devices and use only sterile water (not distilled or tap water) to clean and fill the reservoir. Clean and maintain the device regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions. After cleaning/disinfection, rinse the device with sterile water, cooled freshly boiled water or water filtered with 0.2 μm filters. Never leave stagnant water in the device. Empty the water tank, keep all surfaces dry, and change the water daily; and
- When handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes:
 1. Wear gloves and a face mask;
 2. Water gardens and compost gently using low pressure;
 3. Open composted potting mixes slowly and make sure the opening is directed away from the face;
 4. Wet the soil to reduce dust when potting plants; and
 5. Avoid working in poorly ventilated places such as enclosed greenhouses.

â€‹The public may visit the CHP's [LD page](#), the [Code of Practice for Prevention of LD](#) and the [Housekeeping Guidelines for Cold and Hot Water Systems for Building Management](#) of the Prevention of LD Committee, and the CHP's [risk-based strategy](#) for prevention and control of LD.

Communications Authority press release

The following is issued on behalf of the Communications Authority:

This press release summarises the decision of the Communications Authority (CA) following its 133rd meeting held in April 2024.

CA approves changes to line-up of programme channels of Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB)

The CA has approved an application by TVB for changes to the line-up of programme channels, viz. the replacement of "J2" and "TVB Finance, Sports and Information Channel" by "TVB Plus" under its Channel 82 and the launch of the "Phoenix Hong Kong Channel" under Channel 85 with effect from April 22, 2024. Following the above restructuring, TVB will continue to provide five programme channels under its domestic free television programme service (free TV) licence, and has committed that being a free TV licensee, it will ensure that the broadcast contents, regardless of whether they are self-produced or supplied by third parties, will be in compliance with the requirements stipulated in the Broadcasting Ordinance (Cap. 562) (BO), its free TV licence and the CA's codes of practices.

In approving the application, the CA has taken into account that TVB will continue to comply with all applicable regulatory requirements under the BO and its free TV licence, and to shoulder the editorial responsibility for the broadcast contents included in its licensed service after completion of the above changes in the programme channel line-up.

In this connection, the CA has also approved TVB's application for a temporary waiver from compliance with the subtitling requirement (Note) for "Phoenix Hong Kong Channel" for a period of three months from April 22, 2024, to July 21, 2024, before full compliance with the relevant requirement.

Note: TVB is required to provide, among others, subtitling service for all news, current affairs, weather programmes and emergency announcements, as well as all programmes broadcast between 7pm and 11pm on all of its five programme channels.

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-

contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on April 12 to noon today (April 15), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 360 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category, in the past three days (including last Saturday and Sunday). No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 150 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 42 676 samples of food imported from Japan (including 28 158 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 11 632 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

SCS's opening remarks at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following are the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mrs Ingrid Yeung, at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee this afternoon (April 15):

Chairman and Members,

Among the matters related to the civil service in the 2024-25 Draft Estimates of Expenditure, I would like to focus my introduction on the following items.

The first item is the civil service establishment. To ensure the sustainability of public finances, the Government has strictly controlled the civil service establishment, which has been maintained at zero growth since 2021-22. Bureaux and departments have enhanced effectiveness and efficiency through reprioritisation, internal redeployment, streamlining of work processes and adoption of technologies in taking forward new policies and initiatives of the Government and coping with the increase in workload. The Government will continue to maintain zero growth in the civil service establishment in 2024-25, with the aim of containing the establishment at a level not exceeding that as at end-March 2021. It is expected that there will be about 194 000 posts in the civil service establishment as at end-March 2025. In fact, as compared to that of end-March 2021, despite the continuous increase in public services, not only has the size of civil service establishment not increased in the four-year period, but has reduced by about 2 000 posts on an accumulated basis. It can be seen that bureaux and departments have employed different means to strictly control the civil service establishment together without affecting the provision of public services.

I understand recent concerns over the creation of civil service posts, which I would like to take this opportunity to explain. Maintaining the target of zero growth in the overall establishment does not mean that there can be no growth in the establishment of each bureau/department. The establishment of individual bureaux/departments may still increase having regard to operational needs and with full justifications, provided that the number of posts required to be created must not exceed that of deleted posts no longer required by other bureaux/departments for their operation and time-limited posts deleted upon expiry of duration, in other words there must remain no net growth in the overall civil service establishment.

I am aware that Members are also concerned about the creation of time-limited non-directorate posts and time-limited supernumerary directorate posts. In fact, both types of them are time-limited posts created for tasks that are time-limited in nature or might not be required in the long run. By "time-limited supernumerary directorate posts", it does not mean that they

are counted outside the establishment. All time-limited non-directorate posts and time-limited supernumerary directorate posts are counted towards the establishment, i.e. about 194 000 posts as at end-March 2025 as mentioned earlier.

The second item is about civil service training. Civil servants are the backbone of the Government and the key to improving governance. The Chief Executive put forward a number of initiatives in his 2023 Policy Address to continue strengthening the civil service management system, including enhancing civil service training. The estimated expenditure related to civil service training is around \$250 million in 2024-25. The Civil Service College (the College) will continue to take forward various initiatives to enhance civil service training and provide civil servants with training covering the areas of governance, leadership, public policy-making and international horizons. With the gradual resumption of Mainland and overseas training for civil servants starting from mid-2023, the College will arrange for more middle and senior-ranking civil servants to participate in Mainland and overseas training to further enhance their sense of national identity and broaden their international perspectives.

Regarding the medical and dental benefits for civil servants, the Government will continue to honour its contractual obligation as the employer and provide medical benefits for serving civil servants, pensioners and other eligible persons. The medical services provided by the Hospital Authority (HA) as part of the medical benefits have been included in the overall provision allocated to the HA. Regarding Families Clinic services and dental services provided by the Department of Health (including the pilot scheme on provision of dental scaling services to some civil servants and eligible persons via private dental organisations), a provision of around \$1,149 million has been reserved. Also, we have reserved about \$1,766 million for reimbursement to civil servants, pensioners and other eligible persons of medical expenses that met the criteria.

The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) will continue to implement various policies and initiatives. For example, on recruitment, we have drawn on our experience last year and stepped up publicity efforts to attract more people with aspirations to serve the community to join the civil service. Moreover, the CSB will continue to take forward the initiatives proposed in the Policy Address, including the Mainland Education Award Scheme for Children of Civil Servants launched in January 2024 and the provision of marriage leave and compassionate leave recently introduced in April 2024. We will closely monitor their implementation. We will also finalise and promulgate the updated Civil Service Code (the Code) as soon as possible, after which we will step up education and publicity on the core values and standards of conduct set out in the Code. The above measures will be implemented with existing resources.

Chairman, this is the end of my introduction. I would welcome questions from Members.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Monday, April 15, 2024 is 106 (same as last Saturday's index).

â€‹The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, April 13, 2024 was 106 (up 0.1 against last Friday's index).