

DH calls on public to have regular dental check-ups in support of World Oral Health Day

In support of World Oral Health Day, the Department of Health (DH) today (March 20) launched a new promotional video titled "A HAPPY MOUTH IS...A HAPPY BODY" to encourage the public to have regular dental check-ups, and put prevention, early identification and timely intervention of dental diseases into action.

The World Dental Federation has designated March 20 each year as World Oral Health Day. The theme of this year is "A HAPPY MOUTH IS...A HAPPY BODY", and the Oral Health Education Division (OHED) of the DH launched the new promotion video today under the theme on its YouTube channel, with an aim to bringing forward the message that oral health is closely related to the overall physical health.

The Consultant in-charge, Dental Services of the DH, Dr Kitty Hse, pointed out that oral diseases (such as tooth decay and periodontal disease) share many common behavioural risk factors with non-communicable diseases (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, and cancer), including poor personal hygiene, smoking and excessive sugar intake. Infections in the teeth and the tissues surrounding them may even increase the risk of diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, thereby posing a negative impact on the overall health. As such, safeguarding oral health is of vital importance to one's own health.

Making reference to the Government's [Primary Healthcare Blueprint](#) with the development direction focusing on prevention, early identification and timely intervention, Dr Hse reminded the public to manage their own oral health and maintain good oral hygiene habits, which are the most cost-effective strategies in enhancing the overall level of oral health. Members of the public should carry out thorough teeth cleaning, conduct regular oral check-ups, practise healthy eating habits, reduce sugar intake, and avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. These practices can help prevent oral diseases and maintain overall health. Dr Hse also encourages the public to conduct regular dental check-ups and seek professional advice to ensure optimal oral health.

In addition to promoting oral care tips through a series of promotional videos, the OHED is organising school-based "World Oral Health Day" activities this year for students of different grades with a view to raising their awareness of oral health. These activities include encouraging kindergarten students and parents to design greeting cards together, providing game cards to students with special educational needs, as well as having peer leaders in secondary schools to provide personal oral health guidance to their fellow students. Furthermore, the OHED is disseminating the message of regular dental check-ups to the general public through bus stop

advertisements, MTR train door window stickers, and their Facebook page.

For more information about oral health, please visit the OHED's Toothclub webpage (www.toothclub.gov.hk), the Facebook fan page of "æ,,>ç%™ Love Teeth HK" (www.facebook.com/LoveTeethHK/) and YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/channel/UChJUkaM37cgbNGMi23v0ivQ).

Red flags hoisted at some beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (March 20) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island, and Silverstrand Beach and Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at these beaches.

LCQ17: Government public transport fare concession scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Siu-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

There are views that as the Government has lowered the eligible age for the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (commonly known as the \$2 scheme) to 60 from February 27, 2022, the number of beneficiaries has increased substantially, thus imposing a heavy burden on public finance. Moreover, the \$2 scheme has given rise to problems such as "taking long-haul routes for short journeys" and abuses, resulting in an increase in the amount of relevant subsidies granted by the Government. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the amount of subsidies granted by the Government to various public

transport operators participating in the \$2 scheme, and the recurrent expenditure and administrative cost of the scheme from April 2023 to the end of last month; the estimated amount of relevant subsidies in each of the next five financial years;

(2) in respect of (a) persons aged between 60 and 64, (b) persons aged 65 or above, and (c) eligible persons with disabilities, of the average monthly (i) number of public transport rides (set out in the table below) and (ii) amount of relevant travelling expenses involved for each designated Octopus card or JoyYou Card under the \$2 scheme from March 2022 to the end of last month;

Month	No. of rides	No. of beneficiaries				Percentage share				Cumulative percentage			
		(a)	(b)	(c)	Total	(a)	(b)	(c)	Total	(a)	(b)	(c)	Total
	10 or less												
	11-30												
	31-50												
	51-100												
	Over 100												

(3) as there are views that with some beneficiaries of the \$2 scheme taking long-haul routes for short journeys, public funds have been wasted as a result, whether the Government has considered enhancing the scheme by setting a monthly ceiling on the concession (e.g. \$500, \$1,000 or \$1,500) provided for the beneficiaries, and calculating the amount of concession used on the basis of original fare; if not, of the reasons for that;

(4) as it is learnt that many elderly persons do not understand that taking long-haul routes for short journeys will create a financial burden on the Government, of the details of related publicity and education work in the past three years (including the means and frequency of publicity, as well as the expenditure involved), and whether measures are in place to educate elderly persons to avoid taking long-haul routes for short journeys; if so, of the details; and

(5) of the number of law enforcement actions taken by the relevant law enforcement agencies to combat abuses of the \$2 scheme by ineligible persons in each of the past five years, as well as the number of abuse cases found and the number of cases with summonses issued against the persons concerned?

Reply:

President,

The Financial Secretary announced in the 2024-25 Budget to review the mode of operation of the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (\$2 Scheme) with a

view to maintaining the financial sustainability of the Scheme. The Government has stated clearly that it will maintain the policy intent of the \$2 Scheme to build a caring and inclusive society by encouraging the beneficiaries to participate more in community activities, and has no intention to cancel the Scheme or change the existing beneficiary groups.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Siu-hung is set out below:

(1) The amount of Government's reimbursement of the revenue forgone to the participating public transport operators (PTOs) under the \$2 Scheme for 2023-24 (as at February 29, 2024) is at Annex 1. The revised estimate of the recurrent expenditure of the \$2 Scheme for 2023-24 is about \$4.05 billion. Of this, the revised estimate of the Government's reimbursement of the revenue forgone to the participating PTOs is about \$4.0 billion and the revised estimate of the administrative cost is about \$50 million.

In 2024-25, the estimated Government's reimbursement of the revenue forgone to the participating PTOs under the \$2 Scheme is about \$6.01 billion. Future expenditure of the \$2 Scheme will depend on a number of factors including changes in the population of eligible beneficiaries, fare adjustments, changes in PTOs participating in the \$2 Scheme, the effectiveness of the anti-abuse measures, etc. The Government will closely monitor the operation of the \$2 Scheme, prepare for the estimates of expenditure and reflect in the estimates of the corresponding years.

(2) Monthly statistics concerning the average daily passenger trips under the \$2 Scheme from March 2022 to December 2023 with breakdown by beneficiary groups and the relevant percentages are at Annex 2. The Transport Department (TD) does not maintain information relating to the monthly numbers of trips taken by individual beneficiaries under the Scheme and the amounts of transport expense of individual Octopus or JoyYou Card.

(3) The Government would take into account the effectiveness of different options in containing the growth of expenditure in the review and factors including the practicability of these options.

(4) The Government has all along been enabling the beneficiaries to understand how to make proper use of the \$2 Scheme through publicity and education. The Government has rolled out TV and radio APIs and posted posters at major public bus and public light bus termini as well as public light bus compartments on the routes for which two-way section fares are offered to encourage beneficiaries of the Scheme to make appropriate use of short-haul routes and to assist passengers to understand the arrangement of two-way section fare, so as to reduce the differential fares under the \$2 Scheme and ensure proper use of public funds.

(5) The TD has all along been requesting PTOs to strengthen ticket inspection and passenger identity verification work, and strictly enforce the penalty as set out in relevant legislation and by-laws to prevent abuses of the \$2 Scheme. The TD also conducts surveys and monitors the situation.

During site monitoring surveys jointly conducted by the TD and PTOs in the past five years on the Mass Transit Railway (MTR), buses, ferries, kaitos, minibuses, trams and residents' buses, 1 419 suspected abuse cases were found.

To step up enforcement actions against abuses of the \$2 Scheme by ineligible persons, the TD has enhanced joint enforcement actions with PTOs such as franchised buses and ferries from June 2023 onwards. As at end-February this year, a total of around 350 joint enforcement actions were conducted across 650 routes with about 2 360 persons inspected for suspected abuse of \$2 Scheme, and two suspected abuse cases were found and referred to the Police for follow-up. The court hearing of one of the cases has been completed and the passenger involved was fined approximately \$14,000 and required to repay the underpaid fare (totalling around \$2,000). The other case is currently under the Police's investigation. The TD will continue to conduct joint special inspection and enforcement actions with PTOs and refer suspected abuse cases to the Police for follow-up and criminal investigation where there is sufficient evidence so as to ensure that the resources of the \$2 Scheme are spent on target beneficiaries. During the same period, the MTR Corporation Limited, in its enforcement actions, imposed surcharges to around 4 260 ineligible persons for abusing the \$2 Scheme.

LCQ20: White Form Secondary Market Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Man-kwong and a reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) endorsed in 2017 the regularisation of the White Form Secondary Market Scheme (WSM). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of applicants who succeeded in applying for a Certificate of Eligibility to Purchase (CEP) in each round of WSM since its regularisation, and the percentage of such applicants in the overall number of applicants; among the applicants who succeeded in applying for a CEP in respect of each round of WSM, of the number and percentage of those who succeeded in purchasing a flat subsequently, together with a breakdown by application category (i.e. family applicants and one-person applicants);

(2) of the number of Letter of Nomination issued by the HA in respect of each round of WSM since its regularisation, together with a breakdown by month;

and

(3) whether it has considered increasing the quota for each round of WSM; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In response to the question raised by the Hon Leung Man-kwong, our reply is as follows:

(1) and (2) In response to the aspirations of low-and middle-income families to buy their own homes, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) launched two Interim Schemes to extend the Home Ownership Scheme Secondary Market Scheme to White Form buyers in 2013 and 2015 so as to enrich the housing ladder. After a review and taking into account the sustained demand for subsidised sale flats from White Form buyers, the HA endorsed the regularisation of the Interim Scheme as the White Form Secondary Market Scheme (WSM) from 2018.

WSM 2018 was launched in March 2018 with a quota of 2 500, which was increased to 3 000 in WSM 2019 and 4 500 in WSM 2020. The quota for WSM 2022 and WSM 2023 remained at 4 500, including 4 050 for family applicants and 450 for one-person applicants.

Under the WSM, successful applicants will be invited to apply for a Certificate of Eligibility to Purchase (CEP). The holder is entitled to purchase a subsidised sale flat with premium not yet paid within the 12-month validity period and apply for a Letter of Nomination (LN) within one month from the date of the Provisional Agreement for Sale and Purchase. After obtaining the LN, the applicant can enter into the formal Agreement for Sale and Purchase and the Deed of Assignment to complete the transaction.

For WSM 2018 to WSM 2022, information on the number of application, number of CEP and number of LN (successful purchasers), etc, with breakdown by family applicants and one-person applicants in each exercise is set out at Annex.

(3) The HA has extended the maximum mortgage default guarantee period and repayment period for the Secondary Market Scheme earlier and we are closely monitoring the situation of the secondary market after the implementation of such arrangements. When we launch the WSM in the future, we will take into account different factors, including the demand of White Form applicants towards subsidised sale flats, the secondary market and the market environment as a whole in order to review and determine the quotas for WSM.

LCQ10: Work safety in confined spaces

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

It has been reported that in a fatal industrial accident which happened at Tsim Sha Tsui Austin Road West on September 24 last year, two male workers in their sixties were suspected to have been poisoned to death after inhaling a high concentration of hydrogen sulphide in an underground cooling main. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures in place to prevent the recurrence of similar industrial accidents in confined spaces; whether the authorities will conduct regular inspections of workplaces where confined space works are carried out, so as to ensure the protection of workers' occupational safety and health;

(2) given that the Labour Department is revising the "Code of Practice – Safety and Health at Work in Confined Spaces" (CoP), of the relevant work progress; how the Government ensures that the industry and workers will practically implement the CoP upon completion of the revision work;

(3) whether it will consider subsidising the industry to adopt advanced technology and equipment for confined spaces works, such as installing closed-circuit television cameras, continuous air quality checking systems and locking alarm systems in large-scale confined spaces, as well as introducing machines that can replace workers to carry out works in confined spaces, so as to minimise the risk of accidents; and

(4) whether it will consider enacting legislation to require that tenders involving confined spaces works must specify clearly that the relevant works involve working in confined spaces, to make it mandatory for contractors to comply with the CoP, and to institute prosecutions against contractors or subcontractors who are non-compliant with the CoP?

Reply:

President,

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about the fatal industrial accident that occurred at a construction site on Austin Road West in September 2023. The accident caused the death of two workers. The LD is deeply saddened by the accident and once again expresses our deepest sympathy to the bereaved families.

My reply to the Hon Kwok's question is as follows:

(1) Upon notification of the accident, the LD's officers immediately commenced on-site investigation and will complete the investigation as soon

as practicable. The LD is following up on the accident seriously. Shortly after the accident, the LD issued suspension notices to stop the works concerned. The duty holders need to submit safe method statements for the LD's consideration and the work can only be resumed upon the LD's permission. If there is adequate evidence, the LD will prosecute against those having violated the occupational safety and health (OSH) legislation.

According to the information available at the moment, the accident involved extremely serious OSH contraventions, i.e. involving extremely high culpability or severe negligence and leading to serious consequences of the death of two workers. The LD is working closely with the Department of Justice and actively considering to prosecute against duty holders through indictment with a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for two years according to the newly amended OSH legislation. Moreover, the Police have charged two persons involved with manslaughter.

The LD is very concerned about OSH in confined space work and carries out surprise inspections of workplaces carrying out confined space work from time to time and checks relevant work processes and equipment to ensure workers' OSH is safeguarded. After the accident, the LD launched a two-week special inspection exercise from September 25 to October 6, 2023 targeting the confined space work in construction sites over the territory to curb unsafe work practices and ensure the safety of workers. During the exercise, the LD's officers paid special attention to check whether the duty holders have complied with the requirements on confined space work, including conduction of risk assessments, formulation of appropriate safe work systems, provision of personal protective equipment, etc. During this special inspection exercise, the LD inspected 190 construction sites, issued one improvement notice and 88 written warnings.

(2) In light of the past experience gathered from the investigation of accidents involving confined space works, the LD is revising the "Code of Practice – Safety and Health at Work in Confined Spaces" to strengthen the protection of the safety and health of relevant workers. The LD consulted relevant stakeholders on this matter in November and December 2023, and refined the content of the Code according to the opinions received. Advice from the Department of Justice is being sought. We expect the revision will be completed by the first half of 2024 and the revised Code will be implemented as soon as possible after a suitable time frame for necessary preparation by the industry.

The LD has all along adopted the combination of legislation and enforcement, education and training, and publicity and promotion to prevent the occurrence of work accidents. On the education, publicity and promotion front, the LD organises seminars and OSH training courses regularly, together with various promotional activities, to raise stakeholders' OSH awareness in confined spaces. Moreover, in OSH inspections, the LD will pay attention to the qualification of confined space workers and remind them to cooperate with contractors and employers by implementing OSH measures related to confined spaces to avoid endangering themselves and others.

(3) The LD has all along encouraged the proprietors or contractors to use new

technology, as far as reasonably practicable, thus avoiding workers from entering confined spaces for work, e.g. inspecting the internal part of a sewer by remote control monitoring, using suitable equipment and tools to perform sampling and cleaning work from outside of the confined space, etc.

Since 2022, the LD and the Occupational Safety and Health Council have rolled out the "OSH Star Enterprise – Confined Space Safety Accreditation Scheme". The Scheme provides a series of free-of-charge services to the participating organisations, including training courses related to confined space work, OSH consultancy services and safety management certification. Moreover, the scheme provides subsidies for purchasing safety equipment suitable for working in confined spaces such as safety rescue harnesses, tripods and winches, and approved breathing apparatus to heighten OSH level of the participating organisations.

(4) The Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Confined Spaces) Regulation (Confined Spaces Regulation) has a clear definition of confined space which means any place in which, by virtue of its enclosed nature, there arises a reasonably foreseeable specified risk. Moreover, the Confined Spaces Regulation stipulates that the proprietors or contractors shall take safety precautions, including appointing a competent person to carry out an assessment of the working conditions in the confined space and make recommendations on necessary measures to be taken, providing an effective forced ventilation, using approved breathing apparatus and safety harness when conducting underground pipework, formulating and implementing appropriate procedures to handle emergency situations, etc. Hence, no matter whether a tender indicates confined space work involved or not, the relevant proprietors, contractors and duty holders must comply with these legal requirements.

The LD has issued the "Code of Practice – Safety and Health at Work in Confined Spaces" to provide practical guidance and technical information in relation to confined space works for proprietors, contractors and relevant persons of industrial undertakings. As each workplace has its individual uniqueness, proprietors or contractors might not be able to adopt the recommendations and safety guidance in the Code fully. Therefore, it may not be reasonable and practicable to require the proprietors or contractors to comply with the Code compulsorily.

Nevertheless, the Code is issued by the Commissioner for Labour under section 7A of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance. The Code has a special legal status. Failure to observe any provision of the Code may be taken by a court in criminal proceedings as a relevant factor in determining whether or not a person has breached the relevant safety and health legislation under the Ordinance.