

Update on cases of Legionnaires' disease

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (March 11) 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 March 3 to 9, the CHP recorded five LD cases:

1. A male patient, aged 69 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Kwun Tong District;
2. A female patient, aged 92 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Kowloon City District;
3. A male patient, aged 62 with good past health, who had been to Thailand and Macao during the incubation period and was classified as an imported case;
4. A female patient, aged 64 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Southern District; and
5. A male patient, aged 70 with underlying illnesses, who lives in Yuen Long 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 March 9, 13 LD cases had been reported 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.

[Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement actions against cannabis trafficking and detects largest-ever suspected cannabis buds case in town \(with photos\)](#)

â€‹Hong Kong Customs since January this year has mounted enforcement operations to vigorously combat criminal activities of cannabis trafficking by sea, land, air and in all districts across the territory in Hong Kong, resulting in a total of about 790 kilograms of suspected cannabis seized from January to February. During the operation, Customs also detected a large-scale cannabis buds trafficking case and seized about 570kg of suspected cannabis buds with an estimated market value of about \$115 million. This is the largest-ever cannabis buds case detected by Customs in town.

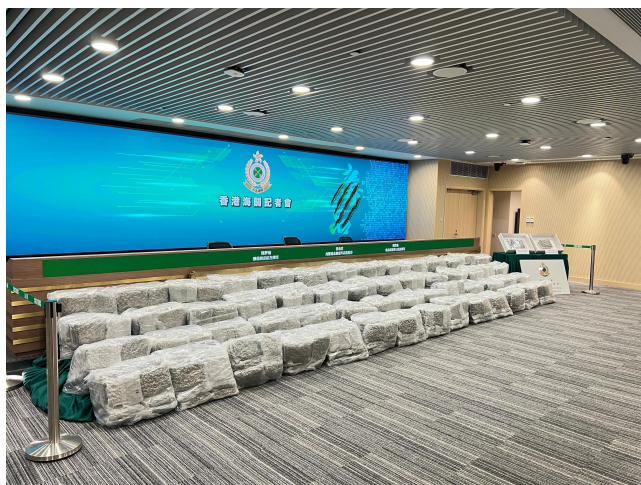
Acting on intelligence analysis, Customs on February 26 raided a logistics warehouse in the New Territories and seized the batch of suspected cannabis buds weighing about 570kg in total from about 145 carton boxes. After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers on March 8 arrested a 53-year-old man who claimed to be a logistics company owner and is suspected to be connected with the case.

An investigation of the above-mentioned case is ongoing and Customs will continue to trace the source and flow of the drugs. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Customs reminds members of the public that cannabis and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) are classified as dangerous drugs under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance. Importation of products (including food or drinks) containing cannabis or THC into Hong Kong is prohibited unless the relevant provisions in the Ordinance are complied with. In order to avoid breaching the law inadvertently, special attention should be paid to the packaging labels of those products.

Under the Ordinance, trafficking in a dangerous drug is a serious offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment.

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



Construction Output for the Fourth Quarter and the Whole Year of 2023

The total gross value of construction works (GVCW) performed by main contractors in the fourth quarter of 2023 increased by 4.2% in nominal terms over a year earlier to \$71.3 billion, according to the provisional results of the Quarterly Survey of Construction Output released today (March 11) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD).

After discounting the effect of price changes, the provisional results showed that the total GVCW performed by main contractors increased by 4.4% in real terms over the same period. GVCW in real terms is derived by deflating the corresponding nominal value with an appropriate price index to the price level in the base period of 2000.

Analysed by type of construction works, the GVCW performed at private sector sites increased by 16.5% in nominal terms in the fourth quarter of 2023 over a year earlier, while that at public sector sites increased by 2.6%. The GVCW at locations other than construction sites decreased by 4.1% in nominal terms over the same period. Construction works at locations other than construction sites included minor new construction activities and decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings; and electrical equipment installation and maintenance works at locations other than construction sites.

In real terms, the GVCW performed at private sector sites increased by 14.4% in the fourth quarter of 2023 compared with the same period in 2022, while an increase of 1.6% was recorded for public sector sites. Meanwhile, the GVCW at locations other than construction sites decreased by 2.3% in the fourth quarter of 2023 over the same period.

On a seasonally adjusted quarter-to-quarter basis, the GVCW performed by

main contractors decreased by 6.8% in nominal terms and 7.6% in real terms in the fourth quarter of 2023 compared with the third quarter of 2023.

For 2023 as a whole, the provisional results showed that the total GVCW performed by main contractors increased by 8.8% in nominal terms compared with 2022 to \$271.0 billion. After discounting the effect of price changes, the total GVCW performed by main contractors in 2023 increased by 9.9% in real terms over 2022.

Analysed by type of construction works, the GVCW performed at private sector sites totalled \$85.0 billion in 2023, up by 27.0% in nominal terms compared with 2022. In real terms, it increased by 25.4%. The GVCW performed at public sector sites amounted to \$93.0 billion in 2023, up by 0.7% in nominal terms compared with 2022. In real terms, it increased by 1.3%.

The GVCW performed by main contractors at locations other than construction sites amounted to \$93.1 billion in 2023, up by 3.6% in nominal terms compared with 2022. In real terms, it increased by 5.2%.

Analysed by major end-use group, residential buildings projects accounted for the largest share in the total GVCW performed at construction sites in 2023. The GVCW performed in respect of these projects amounted to \$69.8 billion in 2023, up by 49.8% in nominal terms compared with 2022. Transport projects constituted the second largest group of construction site works in 2023. The GVCW performed in respect of these projects totalled \$37.2 billion in 2023, up by 7.2% in nominal terms compared with 2022.

Tables 1 and 2 show the provisional figures on the GVCW performed by main contractors in the fourth quarter and the whole year of 2023 respectively. Table 3 shows the revised figures for the third quarter of 2023.

Owing to the widespread sub-contracting practices in the construction industry, a construction establishment can be a main contractor for one contract and a sub-contractor for another contract at the same time. The GVCW performed by main contractors covers only those projects in which the construction establishment takes the role of a main contractor, but not projects in which it takes only the role of a sub-contractor. However, sub-contractors' contribution to projects should have been included in the GVCW performed by main contractors for whom they worked.

The classification of construction establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on the Quarterly Survey of Construction Output". Users can browse and download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1090002&scode=330).

For enquiries about the survey results, please contact the Construction and Miscellaneous Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 6965; email: building@censtatd.gov.hk).

[Results of monthly survey on business situation of small and medium-sized enterprises for February 2024](#)

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (March 11) the results of the Monthly Survey on Business Situation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) for February 2024.

The current diffusion index (DI) on business receipts amongst SMEs increased from 43.3 in January 2024 in the contractionary zone to 43.9 in February 2024, whereas the one-month's ahead (i.e. March 2024) outlook DI on business receipts was 46.6. Analysed by sector, the current DIs on business receipts, despite below the 50-mark, rose in February 2024 as compared with previous month for majority of the surveyed sectors, particularly for the import and export trades (from 42.6 to 43.8) and business services (from 48.4 to 49.2).

The current DI on new orders for the import and export trades increased from 43.2 in January 2024 to 43.8 in February 2024, whereas the outlook DI on new orders in one month's time (i.e. March 2024) was 46.2.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that overall business sentiment among SMEs and their expectations on the business situation in one month's time showed some improvement in February. The overall employment situation was largely stable.

The spokesman added that the complicated external environment may continue to dampen business sentiment in the near term. Nonetheless, business sentiment should see some support alongside continued economic growth and the probable easing of financial conditions later in the year. The Government will monitor the situation closely.

Further information

The Monthly Survey on Business Situation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises aims to provide a quick reference, with minimum time lag, for assessing the short-term business situation faced by SMEs. SMEs covered in this survey refer to establishments with fewer than 50 persons engaged.

Respondents were asked to exclude seasonal fluctuations in reporting their views. Based on the views collected from the survey, a set of diffusion indices (including current and outlook diffusion indices) is compiled. A reading above 50 indicates that the business condition is generally favourable, whereas that below 50 indicates otherwise. As for statistics on the business prospects of prominent establishments in Hong Kong, users may refer to the publication entitled "Report on Quarterly Business Tendency Survey" released by the C&SD.

The results of the survey should be interpreted with care. The survey solicits feedback from a panel sample of about 600 SMEs each month and the survey findings are thus subject to sample size constraint. Views collected from the survey refer only to those of respondents on their own establishments rather than those on the respective sectors they are engaged in. Besides, in this type of opinion survey on expected business situation, the views collected in the survey are affected by the events in the community occurring around the time of enumeration, and it is difficult to establish precisely the extent to which respondents' perception of the business situation accords with the underlying trends. For this survey, main bulk of the data were collected around the last week of the reference month.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey on the Business Situation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises". Users can browse and download the publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080015&scode=300).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact Industrial Production Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7246; email: sme-survey@censtatd.gov.hk).

Quarterly business receipts indices for service industries for fourth quarter of 2023 and Whole Year of 2023

Business receipts in value terms of most of the major service industries showed increases of varying magnitudes in the fourth quarter of 2023 when compared with the fourth quarter of 2022, according to the provisional figures of business receipts indices released today (March 11) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD).

Comparing the fourth quarter of 2023 with the fourth quarter of 2022, double-digit increases were recorded in business receipts indices of the accommodation services (+73.6%), and administrative and support services (+13.3%) industries. On the other hand, the courier industry recorded a

decrease of 12.6% in business receipts index during the same period.

Analysed by service domain, business receipts index of the tourism, convention and exhibition services domain increased by 285.3% year-on-year during the same period, while that of the computer and information technology services domain also increased by 91.0% year-on-year.

On a seasonally adjusted quarter-to-quarter comparison, business receipts in value terms of most of the major service industries recorded increases of varying magnitudes in the fourth quarter of 2023 when compared with the third quarter of 2023. In particular, business receipts indices of the transportation and accommodation services industries increased by 6.0% and 5.9% respectively. On the other hand, business receipts index of the insurance industry decreased by 6.7% during the same period.

Analysed by service domain, comparing the fourth quarter of 2023 with the third quarter of 2023 on a seasonally adjusted basis, business receipts index of the computer and information technology services domain increased by 5.2%, whereas that of the tourism, convention and exhibition services domain decreased by 4.0%.

For 2023 as a whole, around half of the major service industries recorded year-on-year increases in business receipts. Double-digit increases were recorded in business receipts indices of the accommodation services (+59.7%), food services (+26.1%), banking (+21.2%), administrative and support services (+16.6%), and retail (+16.2%) industries. On the other hand, double-digit decreases were recorded in business receipts indices of the transportation (-17.3%) and courier (-11.9%) industries.

Analysed by services domain, business receipts index of the tourism, convention and exhibition services domain increased by 345.2%, while that of the computer and information technology services domain also increased by 39.2% during the same period.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that business of most service industries improved in the fourth quarter of 2023, thanks to the continued economic revival.

Business receipts of most service industries saw year-on-year increases in the fourth quarter of 2023, notably the accommodation services, land transport, air transport, and administrative and support services industries. On a seasonally adjusted quarter-to-quarter comparison, business receipts of most service industries also increased.

Looking ahead, continued growth of the local economy should provide support to the business of various service industries. Some service industries may be more affected by geopolitical tensions and decelerating global economic growth, but their performance may gradually stabilise if global financial conditions ease as expected later in the year.

Further information

Table 1 presents the business receipts indices and their corresponding year-on-year rates of change in respect of selected service industries and service domains for the recent five quarters, while Table 2 shows the corresponding quarter-to-quarter rates of change in the business receipts indices for the recent five quarters based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The revised figures of business receipts indices for the fourth quarter of 2023 will be released at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=660-69001) on April 19, 2024.

Data for compiling the business receipts indices are mainly based on the Quarterly Survey of Service Industries conducted by the C&SD, supplemented by relevant data provided by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

A service domain differs from a service industry in that it comprises those economic activities which straddle different industries but are somehow related to a common theme. It may include all activities carried out by all establishments in a service industry that is closely related to the domain. For a service industry that is less closely related, however, only a portion of the establishments in the industry or even only part of the economic activities of the establishments is related to the domain. Taking the tourism, convention and exhibition services domain as an example, it includes all services of convention and exhibition organisers, short-term accommodation services and services of travel agents, and some of the services (only those involving visitors as customers) of restaurants, retailers and transport operators.

The classification of service industries follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into relevant industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the report "Quarterly Business Receipts Indices for Service Industries, Fourth Quarter 2023". Users can browse and download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080006&scode=520).

For enquiries about the business receipts indices, please contact the Business Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7267 or e-mail: business-receipts@censtatd.gov.hk).