

## Effectiveness and situation of first phase of territory-wide large-scale anti-illicit cigarette enforcement operation "Tempest" by Hong Kong Customs (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a territory-wide large-scale special operation codenamed "Tempest" in mid-February to step up enforcement in combating illicit cigarette activities on all fronts at each control point and all districts across the territory in Hong Kong. In the first phase of the operation (as of February 28), Customs detected a total of 560 related cases and seized about 16 million suspected illicit cigarettes, about 1 760 grams of cigars, and about 400g of manufactured tobacco products with a total estimated market value of about \$62 million and a duty potential of about \$43 million. During the operation, Customs arrested 538 persons aged between 18 and 83, and detained three vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution. Furthermore, Customs has collaborated with the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office of the Department of Health to crack down on the distribution of illicit cigarette promotion leaflets in public housing estates and the sale of illicit cigarettes through telephone orders.

At the cross-boundary smuggling level, Customs has stepped up efforts to combat smuggling of tobacco products at airport, port, land boundary, rail and ferry control points, and detected a total of 17 illicit cigarette smuggling cases. Moreover, Customs imposed penalties to 481 incoming passengers on offences compoundable under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (imposing penalty instead of prosecution), with total penalties of \$2 million. During the operation, a total of about 90,000 suspected duty-not-paid illicit cigarettes, about 1 760 grams of suspected duty-not-paid cigars and about 400g of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco products were seized.

During the operation, Customs also detected a large-scale cigarettes smuggling case. Through risk assessment and intelligence analysis on February 22, Customs officers at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound selected for inspection a 40-foot container, declared as carrying plastic boxes and mouse pads, arriving from United Arab Emirates to Hong Kong. Upon inspection, Customs officers found 4.2 million suspected illicit cigarettes in the container.

At the storage and distribution level, Customs also cracked down on illicit cigarette storage centres downtown. Among them, Customs shut down a large-scale mobile illicit cigarette storage centre. Customs officers identified on February 22 a cigarette smuggling syndicate active in Tuen Mun District and raided a medium goods vehicle and a 40-foot container parked in

an open-air parking lot in Tuen Mun that night. After searches, Customs officers seized about 3.2 million and 5.4 million suspected illicit cigarettes in the vehicle and container respectively, and arrested a 26-year-old man suspected to be connected with the case.

Customs has also taken strict enforcement actions against small illicit cigarette storage and distribution centres downtown. Customs cracked down on an illicit cigarette storage and distribution centre at a subdivided unit in an urban area, commonly known as a "subdivided room". Customs officers seized about 350 000 suspected illicit cigarettes from the "subdivided room" in Sham Shui Po on February 21 and arrested a 53-year-old woman suspected to be connected with the case.

At the peddling and retail level, Customs during the operation arrested a total of 30 men and five women in various districts across Hong Kong, including 25 buyers and 10 sellers. Most of the relevant cases involved buying and selling of small quantities of illicit cigarettes for personal use.

All the above-mentioned cases have been duly followed up. Customs will continue to trace the source and flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Customs will continue to step up enforcement to vigorously combat different levels of illicit cigarette activities through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and interception at source.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Customs reminds members of the public that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. 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.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, incoming passengers, who fail to declare or make a false or incomplete declaration to a Customs officer on the quantity of dutiable goods in their possession which are in excess of the duty-free concessions are liable to prosecution. In 2023, the maximum penalty imposed by the court for possession of dutiable commodities by an incoming passenger is \$20,000, and the maximum imprisonment sentence is three months.

Customs may consider imposing penalty on offences compoundable under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance. Under the "Compounding Scheme", an offender is required to pay a penalty five times the equivalent of the duty payable on the dutiable goods concerned plus a fine of \$2,000. Under the new duty rates of tobacco, if a passenger brings an extra pack of 200 stick cigarettes which are in excess of the duty-free concessions into Hong Kong without declaring it to Customs officers, the offender is required to pay a

penalty of \$5,306 under the "Compounding Scheme"

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](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)) or online form ([eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002](http://eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002)).



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## [New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme attracts applications on launch day, signaling strong interest and confidence from high-net-worth individuals \(with photo\)](#)

The New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (the Scheme) opened for application today (March 1).

Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK), responsible for assessing whether the applications fulfil the financial requirements under the Scheme, reported that as at close of business on the first day of launch, the department received over 100 enquiries from different channels, including at its counter, through its hotline and online. Around 70 per cent are professional service providers.

The Director-General of InvestHK, Ms Alpha Lau, said, "The Scheme has garnered considerable interest on the first day of launch, and the department has already received applications on the first day. It shows that high-net-worth individuals have confidence in Hong Kong's stable business environment. They are interested in the diverse investment channels the city has to offer and wish to settle in Hong Kong with their families."

InvestHK will continue to work diligently in promoting the Scheme to international stakeholders and professional service providers.



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## Public urged to heighten vigilance against measles

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (March 1) reminded members of the public to stay vigilant amid the recent increase in measles cases globally and stressed that vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles.

"Globally, many countries worldwide, including some countries in Europe, Central Asia and Southeast Asia, are facing a resurgence of measles due to a backslide in vaccination coverage rates after the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 58 000 people in Europe and Central Asia infected with measles in 2023. A similar upward trend was observed in our neighbouring countries such as the Philippines and Malaysia, where measles remains endemic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the number of measles cases had risen worldwide with 168 countries reporting over 300 000 cases in 2023, a roughly 79 per cent increase from 2022." a spokesman for the CHP said.

The spokesman pointed out that in September 2016, the WHO confirmed that Hong Kong has achieved the interruption of endemic measles virus transmission in the presence of a well-performing surveillance system and high level of population vaccination and immunity. While the vaccination coverage of two doses of measles-containing vaccines in the local population were all along maintaining at over 95 per cent, Hong Kong being an international city with a high volume of international travel has been facing the risk of measles virus importation and the potential risk of a further spread in the local community.

The spokesman added, "People born in Hong Kong before 1967 are considered to have acquired immunity to measles through natural infection, while those born after 1967 should have been protected from measles through a comprehensive territory-wide childhood vaccination programme. For a small proportion of local-born citizens who did not receive two doses of measles vaccine before, they could seek advice from doctor on measles vaccination."

The spokesman further commented, "In view of the measles vaccination coverage overseas, new immigrants, foreign workers and students who have not had two doses of measles vaccination in their home country should consult their family doctors and complete their measles vaccination in Hong Kong promptly."

In view of the recent increase in measles activity globally and the risk of importation, the CHP has issued letters to alert doctors and private hospitals to inform them of the latest measles situation, remind them to stay vigilant and report any suspected cases. Moreover, letters to employment agencies for foreign domestic helpers, airport/vessel community/cruise ship agents, and universities were delivered to advise them to encourage combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination among foreign domestic helpers, workers of border control points, and university staff or students respectively.

MMR vaccination is available in most private health clinics in Hong Kong. Parents are reminded to maintain up-to-date immunisation for their children according to the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme for timely and comprehensive protection.

Measles is a highly infectious disease caused by the measles virus. It can be transmitted by airborne droplets or direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected persons, and, less commonly, by articles soiled with nose and throat secretions. A patient can pass the disease to other persons from four days before to four days after the appearance of a skin rash.

The spokesman advised, "The incubation period (the period from infection to appearance of illness) of measles ranges from seven days to 21 days. Symptoms of measles include fever, skin rash, cough, runny nose and red eyes. If symptoms arise, members of the public should wear surgical masks, stop going to work or school and avoid going to crowded places. They should also avoid contact persons with weakened immunity, pregnant women and children aged below 1. Those suspected to have been infected are advised to seek medical attention as early as possible and reveal relevant contact history of measles to healthcare professionals."

Besides being vaccinated against measles, members of the public should take the following measures to prevent infection:

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly;
- Wash hands when they are dirtied by respiratory secretions, such as after sneezing;
- Cover the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and mouth discharge properly;
- Clean used toys and furniture properly; and
- Persons with measles should be kept out of school until four days from the appearance of a rash to prevent the spread of the infection to non-immune persons in school.

â€‹For more information on measles, the public may visit the CHP's [measles thematic page](#). Members of the public who are going to travel can visit the website of the DH's [Travel Health Service](#) for news of measles outbreaks outside Hong Kong.

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## [HK and Hungary sign MOU on correctional services \(with photo\)](#)

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) and the Hungarian Prison Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) today (March 1) to promote mutual exchanges and co-operation on correctional services with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of correctional work.

The MOU was signed in Hungary by the Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Wong Kwok-hing, and the Director General of the Hungarian Prison Service, Lieutenant General Dr Tamás Tóth.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Mr Wong said that the MOU sets out that the two sides will strive to develop and implement co-operation programmes including joint research, personnel and information exchanges, and experience sharing in correctional services. He added that the signing of the MOU is of great significance as it will facilitate the development of the two correctional authorities, establish long-term co-operation, as well as increase professional exchanges in international correctional services.

â€‹The CSD has signed MOUs with the correctional authorities of Canada, Singapore and South Korea since 2001, and will continue to expand co-operation and strengthen exchanges with international correctional authorities.



# Conclusion of Hong Kong Green Week-Finance Stream

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Green Week-Finance Stream was successfully concluded today (March 1). More than 1 600 participants from close to 30 jurisdictions attended the various sustainability-themed events. The attendees represented financial institutions, corporates, central banks, international organisations, government agencies, academia, consulting firms, among others.

The anchor finance event of the Hong Kong Green Week was the Climate Business Forum: Asia Pacific (CBF), co-hosted by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the International Finance Corporation. It was kicked off on February 26 and attracted more than 400 participants, including top decision makers in global business and finance, to discuss solutions to unlock climate financing in the Asia Pacific. The two-day event covered a broad range of topics including the energy transition, decarbonisation of heavy industries, the circular economy, the future of sustainable finance, and new climate technologies in emerging and developing markets in the Asia Pacific.

Riding on the CBF, institutions from the public and private sector organised more than 10 roundtables, seminars, and networking events focusing on themes such as climate finance, carbon markets, electric vehicle supply chain, net-zero transition financing, green classification framework, and financing green development in the Belt and Road region. In addition, the HKMA and the International Monetary Fund co-hosted the Asia Climate Finance Roundtable on February 29, which explored the key steps to scale up climate finance and the role of central banks and regulators in managing climate risks.

The events this week provided a platform for industry participants to spur new business development, facilitate knowledge exchange and networking opportunities, and promote collaboration across the public and private sectors to meet the Asia Pacific region's climate financing challenges.

The Hong Kong Green Week-Finance Stream is part of the HKMA's broader efforts to promote and enrich the green and sustainable ecosystem in Hong Kong. During the autumn of 2024, the HKMA and the Dubai Financial Services Authority will also co-host the Joint Climate Finance Conference in Hong Kong, which will explore common opportunities and challenges in accelerating the flow of transition financing in the Middle East and Asia.