

Two new COVID-19 cases related to Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) said the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) today (July 27) has notified that a new confirmed case and a preliminary confirmed case of COVID-19 related to the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), which involve two buyers. The buyers concerned earlier sought medical treatment from private clinics after feeling unwell and took virus tests. They were informed by the CHP last night (July 26) and this morning that they were preliminarily tested positive and tested positive for COVID-19 respectively. In addition, the CHP today has noted that an earlier preliminary case concerning a buyer has been changed to a confirmed case.

The SSSH has immediately conducted thorough cleaning and disinfection at places where the person concerned had stayed or visited, and will fully co-operate with the CHP for its follow-up investigation. So far there are a total of five COVID-19 cases found to be related to SSSH, of which two are confirmed cases, while the other three are preliminary confirmed cases. Since there are three buyers preliminarily tested positive or tested positive for COVID-19, the SSSH will endeavour to complete the virus tests for all of the stakeholders going in and out of the SSSH as soon as possible, so as to have the infected persons isolated timely.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The Government is very concerned about the cases in relation to SSSH, and will strive to ensure the smooth operation of the slaughterhouse and that the supply of live pigs will not be affected. The Government and the SSSH have reviewed the purchase and sale process and has implemented social distancing measures in the slaughterhouse. It will closely monitor the latest development and further enhance anti-epidemic measures in light of the actual circumstances."

The spokesman said the operation of the SSSH has remained normal, and it has strived to ensure that its operation meets the required hygienic and environmental standards, and that all meat supplied to the market is fit for human consumption. The FEHD and CHP have contacted the operator to better understand the situation, and have immediately implemented all necessary measures and follow-up work to safeguard public hygiene and public health.

The CHP has already contacted the two buyers of the new cases today for investigation and has traced their close contacts in the slaughterhouse. Arrangements will be made for them to be tested or isolated if necessary.

Upon receiving notification of the first preliminary confirmed case found to be related to a worker in the slaughterhouse last Friday, the SSSH, in addition to regularly undertaking daily thorough cleaning and disinfection work according to the daily clearance arrangement, has immediately conducted additional enhanced deep cleaning and disinfection work at its surrounding areas, offices, rest areas and public facilities in the past few days.

During the epidemic, the SSSH has required all workers to observe the personal protective equipment guidelines, and implemented the following anti-epidemic measures:

- (1) Install two infrared body temperature monitors at the entrance to ensure that only people with normal body temperature are allowed to enter the slaughterhouse;
- (2) Require all people to wear a mask when they are in the slaughterhouse;
- (3) Require all people to maintain social distancing and avoid gathering;
- (4) Provide alcohol-based handrub and remind all people to keep their hands clean; and
- (5) Remind all those working in the slaughterhouse to observe personal hygiene, and that if they feel unwell, they should seek medical advice as soon as possible and should not go to work.

To further protect the health and safety of the workers working at the lairage area, in addition to requiring all workers to wear a face mask and increase social distance in the slaughterhouse, all workers working at the lairage area are additionally given a protective gown every day as enhanced protection.

The spokesman stressed that members of the public need not to be worried about the food safety of meat slaughtered at the slaughterhouse. According to the current scientific information and advice of the World Health Organization (WHO), it is unlikely that humans will be infected with COVID-19 via food. Members of the public are unlikely to be infected via fresh meat slaughtered at the slaughterhouse.

Nevertheless, the Center for Food Safety, based on the WHO advice on food safety, reminds the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times, including washing hands before and after handling raw and cooked foods; separating raw meat and internal organs from cooked foods; cooking food thoroughly, avoiding to eat raw or undercooked animals, etc. so as to ensure food safety.