

LCQ14: Prevention of infectious diseases at LCSD's facilities

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Kin-por and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (June 23):

Question:

The peak season of infectious diseases, such as seasonal influenza (influenza) and enterovirus, etc., recurs in Hong Kong every year. It has been reported that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has not formulated new health protection measures for its facilities (e.g. children playrooms, etc.) in various districts and also does not have a standardised disinfection procedure nor conduct registration for the persons who access such facilities, rendering such facilities possible venues for virus transmission. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the disinfection procedures for various types of facilities of LCSD (including children playrooms, public swimming pools, fitness rooms and public toilets, etc.) and their implementation at present; how LCSD ensures that such procedures are standardised and actually implemented;

(b) whether LCSD adopts special disinfection measures for its facilities during the peak season for the outbreak of infectious diseases (e.g. influenza and enterovirus, etc.); if it will, of the specific contents of the measures; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) whether the Government will further enhance the preventive and contingency measures in such places as community facilities, schools and kindergartens, etc., which are susceptible to outbreaks of infectious diseases (e.g. influenza and enterovirus, etc.) so as to avoid massive infections; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) of the number of complaints received in the past five years by LCSD about the cleanliness and hygienic conditions of its facilities, as well as the contents of the complaints; whether LCSD had made any improvements; if it had, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(a) The LCSD attaches great importance to the cleanliness and hygiene of various facilities (including children's playrooms, public swimming pools, fitness rooms, toilets and libraries) under its management. There are guidelines on the daily cleansing and disinfection programme of these facilities to reduce the chance of transmission of infectious diseases.

For public swimming pools, apart from the routine cleansing operation during the opening hours, there is a one-hour session break each at noon and in the evening for cleaning the bottom, side walls and surrounding areas of the pools. In addition, another cleansing operation, enhanced with the disinfection of pool water, is conducted every night when the pools are closed to ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of pool water. Besides, all pools are closed for half a day on a designated weekday every week for thorough cleansing of the pools and other facilities. To ensure that the water quality is up to standard, pool water samples are taken for testing on an hourly basis during opening hours to assess whether the residual chlorine levels and pH value meet the hygiene standard. Arrangements are also made to collect pool water samples for bacteriological testing every week.

As for other recreation venues and cultural facilities, in addition to daily cleansing, 1:99 diluted household bleach is used for more thorough cleansing and disinfection during opening hours. In case of contamination by vomit, the facilities/areas will be disinfected at once with 1:49 diluted household bleach, followed by rinsing with clean water.

The LCSD has also drawn up cleansing guidelines specifically for children's playrooms and playgrounds for the compliance of cleansing staff. As regards indoor children's playrooms, cleansing work is carried out immediately after each session, 1:99 diluted household bleach is used for disinfection, followed by cleaning with water. Overall speaking, children's playrooms are cleansed and disinfected no less than four times a day. After daily service hours, all facilities as well as the floor and the walls are once again disinfected with 1:99 diluted household bleach. Venue supervisors are required to inspect the hygienic condition of the playrooms before they are open each day. As children's playrooms are air-conditioned, air filters and air handling units of the ventilation systems are cleansed and checked regularly to

maintain good ventilation. The LCSD also provides anti-bacterial hand sanitisers at children's playrooms. Parents and their children are requested to clean their hands with sanitisers before and after using the facilities.

With regard to outdoor children playgrounds, cleansing is carried out by cleansing staff at least twice a day. All facilities are disinfected with 1:99 diluted household bleach, followed by cleaning with water. In addition, the Department closely monitors the use of children's playrooms and playgrounds - any persons found to be showing symptoms of infectious diseases will be immediately advised to leave and seek medical treatment.

Management staff and venue supervisors in various districts under the LCSD inspect the venues on a regular basis to ensure that all cleansing and disinfection operations are carried out in accordance with the Department's guidelines.

(b) In view of the recent increasing prevalence of the hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) and enterovirus 71 (EV71), the LCSD has reminded its staff to step up the daily cleansing and disinfection programmes of its venues, including lobbies, changing rooms, toilets and drainage with 1:99 diluted household bleach. If any venues or facilities are contaminated by vomit, 1:49 diluted household bleach should be used for cleansing and disinfection immediately.

Meanwhile, the LCSD has sought the advice of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) on the procedures of cleansing and disinfection for the purpose of preventing the spread of infectious diseases such as enterovirus. The LCSD will continue to step up cleansing and disinfection operation in its facilities, including:

- (i) arranging for the disinfection of lift buttons on an hourly basis;
- (ii) arranging for the cleansing and disinfection of objects frequently touched by human, such as escalator/handrails and door knobs four times a day;
- (iii) cleansing and disinfecting the facilities immediately before and after each major event, or before and after use by venue hirers of large-scale activities;
- (iv) disinfecting the sanitising floor mats at the entrance of buildings every two hours;

(iv) installing automatic disinfectant hand soap dispensers at the entrance or in the lobby of venues; and

(v) displaying publicity posters of the DH at prominent locations of the Department's venues, so as to remind the public to maintain personal hygiene.

The LCSD will continue to maintain close liaison with the DH, and will adopt appropriate preventive measures having regard to the advice of the DH.

(c) In view of the forthcoming peak season of enterovirus (EV) in the community, the CHP of the DH has sent letters to all kindergartens, child care centres and institutions as well as primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong in March, April and May this year, reminding them of the importance of maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene, and advising them measures for preventing and controlling the outbreak of HFMD.

In collaboration with the Education Bureau and the Social Welfare Department, the CHP organised a series of health talks in April this year to strengthen measures in preventing and controlling HFMD and EV infections.

To further strengthen precautionary and contingency measures, the Government held an inter-departmental meeting on May 27, 2010 to review the latest situation of HFMD and EV71. It was agreed that further preventive and control measures should be adopted by different parties, and that the current criteria on class suspension at individual child care institutions/schools due to EV71 infection should be maintained. The Departments concerned will also launch intensified community education programmes on the prevention of infectious diseases through television, radio, public venues and other channels.

To strengthen risk communication, a daily report of the latest situation of HFMD and EV71 infections is being uploaded to the CHP website, which includes the names of schools/institutions with newly reported HFMD outbreaks and those schools/institutions with class suspension in effect.

The CHP will continue to monitor the latest developments in Hong Kong and overseas. It will work with other Departments to take preventive and control measures as appropriate.

(d) Over the past five years, the LCSD has received a total of 2,497 complaints about the cleanliness and hygienic conditions of its recreation and cultural facilities. Problems of different natures were involved, including blockage of drains, accumulation of garbage in planters, mosquito nuisance, contamination/poor quality of water in swimming pools, dirty or slippery toilets/changing rooms, littering in outdoor areas and bird droppings on theatre pavements.

Upon receipt of the complaints, the LCSD had immediately arranged for cleansing staff to take follow-up actions. Where necessary, the venue under complaint would be thoroughly cleansed. In addition, the management staff and venue supervisors in various districts would step up inspection to ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of the venues.

Ends/Wednesday, June 23, 2010

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