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**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene and
Panel on Health Services**

**Minutes of joint meeting
held on Tuesday, 22 October 2002 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon WONG Yung-kan
* Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo

Members of the Panel on Health Services

Dr Hon LO Wing-lok (Chairman)
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP

Members absent : Members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

* Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Members of the Panel on Health Services

Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Dr Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP

(* Also members of the Panel on Health Services)

(# Also members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene)

Public Officers : Mrs Carrie YAU
Attending Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Edward LAW
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene) 2
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Y Y HO
Consultant (Community Medicine)
(Risk Assessment and Communication)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr P Y LEUNG
Deputy Director of Health (1)

Dr L Y TSE
Consultant (Community Medicine) 1
Department of Health

Clerk in : Mrs Constance LI
Attendance Chief Assistant Secretary (2)5

Staff in : Ms Joanne MAK
Attendance Senior Assistant Secretary (2)2

Action

I. Election of Chairman

Mr Fred LI was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II. Follow-up discussion on measures to control the spread of dengue fever
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 133/02-03(01)]

2. The Chairman welcomed the Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (PS(HWF)), who was also the Chairman of the Anti-mosquito Steering Committee, and other representatives of the Administration, to the meeting. PS(HWF) thanked the media for their wide coverage of dengue fever, as this had enhanced public understanding of the disease. She said that in 1998 the World

Health Organization (WHO) had warned about possible major outbreaks of dengue fever. The Administration had been closely monitoring the dengue situation in Hong Kong since 1994 when dengue fever was made a statutorily notifiable disease.

3. PS(HWF) pointed out that in Hong Kong, the strategy for controlling dengue fever was mainly through mosquito epidemiological surveillance, control and public education. She stressed that concerted efforts of the Administration and the public were necessary in order to control the breeding of the *Aedes albopictus*, the mosquito vector of dengue fever. While there might not be a major outbreak of dengue fever in the current year, there was no room for complacency. Sustained efforts would be made before the next wet season came. She said that the Administration would continue to step up liaison with WHO and overseas health authorities in order to enhance effectiveness of the control measures.

4. Consultant (Community Medicine) (C(CM)) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) gave a Powerpoint presentation on the dengue situation in Hong Kong and in the neighbouring places, as well as the measures taken for mosquito prevention and control of the spread of dengue fever.

(Post-meeting note : The presentation materials were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 214/02-03(01) dated 30 October 2002.)

Discussion

Way of transmission

5. Dr David CHU expressed appreciation of the Administration's efforts made in mosquito prevention and control. He sought confirmation as to whether dengue fever could be transmitted by the mosquito vector which bit another person after biting an infected person. Deputy Director of Health (1) (DD(H)1) replied in the affirmative, adding that the disease could be transmitted from persons to mosquitoes and vice versa.

Raising public alertness

6. Referring to Annex A of the Administration's paper, Mr Michael MAK expressed concern that Hong Kong people might get infected if they travelled to places with high incidence of dengue fever, and they would bring the disease to Hong Kong. He pointed out that, for example, there were 89 770 cases of dengue fever in Thailand in 2002. As Hong Kong could not control the dengue situation in other countries, he asked what measures would be taken to control the spread of the disease from these places to Hong Kong.

7. PS(HWF) responded that the Administration shared the concern of Mr MAK and had therefore taken measures to prevent mosquito breeding, and the mosquito control work would extend into winter. She briefed members of the following measures taken -

- (a) FEHD would complete within three weeks a round of inspection to common parts of private tenement buildings to eliminate potential mosquito breeding grounds. Another round would be conducted before the Lunar New Year;
- (b) the Home Affairs Department (HAD) would approach Owners' Incorporations and Mutual Aid Committees to seek their co-operation in the anti-mosquito exercise, targeting at proper refuse management and keeping common parts of buildings clean;
- (c) HAD would seek the endorsement of the Clean Hong Kong District Promotion Committee for the setting up of a working group to actively involve the District Councils and other district organisations in the territory-wide anti-mosquito exercise;
- (d) arrangement was being made to invite a dengue vector expert from WHO to Hong Kong to help improve preventive and control measures;
- (e) inspections to black spots would be stepped up and a review would be conducted as to whether existing penalties were sufficient to deter non-compliance with anti-mosquito measures;
- (f) prosecutions against construction sites in breach of anti-mosquito measures and public education on mosquito prevention and control had been stepped up; and
- (g) a series of control measures would be implemented by various departments as detailed in paragraph 22 of the Administration's paper.

PS(HWF) further said that precautionary measures to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes and avoid mosquito bites were available on FEHD's website and posters. She said that if necessary, publicity of these measures through the media could be stepped up. She said that additional ovitraps would be placed at strategic locations to strengthen the monitoring of mosquito breeding. However, she admitted that there was no foolproof measure for the control of dengue fever, and concerted efforts of the community were necessary.

8. DD(H)1 supplemented that the Administration had stepped up publicity at control points and there were announcements about measures that travellers should take to prevent mosquito bites and on the symptoms of dengue fever. The Administration had also liaised with the Travel Industry Council and asked travel agents to advise travellers to take the necessary precautionary measures.

9. The Chairman asked whether the Administration had information on the dengue situation in the Mainland which was the most popular place that Hong Kong people travelled to. PS(HWF) responded that the Administration had maintained close liaison with the health authorities in the Mainland especially in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, and had learnt that there were some confirmed cases in these cities. DD(H)1 added that according to the website of WHO, there had been some 300 dengue fever cases in the Mainland in 2001.

Mosquito breeding index

10. Mr Andrew CHENG requested the Administration to explain further about the "mosquito breeding index" to be introduced in 2003, such as its reliability and what Hong Kong people should do if the index was on the high side. He also asked whether the Administration was confident that it had sufficient frontline healthcare personnel to deal with a major dengue fever outbreak should it happen in Hong Kong.

11. C(CM) explained that ovitraps were a simple device for detecting the larval breeding rate of mosquitoes. They were small cups filled with a thin layer of water to attract female *Aedes albopictus* to lay eggs. He said that a high index for a particular district indicated a high breeding rate of *Aedes albopictus* in that district, as well as a higher chance of a dengue fever outbreak if an infected person moved into the area.

12. C(CM) further said that FEHD had started conducting studies on the distribution of *Aedes albopictus* in Hong Kong by ovitraps since 2000. Starting from 2003 onwards, ovitraps would be placed at 38 places in 18 districts each month. The Administration would publicise for general information the mosquito breeding rate in each district and the measures to take.

13. C(CM) stressed that the taking of precautionary measures should not restrict only to times when the index was high. He said that anti-mosquito work should be part of our daily life, and anti-mosquito work should be conducted at least once a week. He advised that it only took one week for an egg to develop into a mosquito, and an egg could survive throughout winter. He said that when the index for a particular district was high, anti-mosquito work in that district would be stepped up and additional staff would be re-deployed for such work.

14. DD(H)1 stressed that mosquito prevention, surveillance and control were the strategies adopted to control the spread of dengue fever. He said that if such control work was effective, the risk of a major dengue fever outbreak would be greatly minimised.

15. Dr LO Wing-lok expressed support for Hong Kong people to carry out anti-mosquito work every week in order to eliminate any potential breeding place. He suggested that the Administration should continue its publicity during winter to keep people vigilant of the risk of dengue fever.

16. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked if it was adequate to provide ovitraps only in 38 places. C(CM) explained that the 38 places covered all the 18 districts and it should be adequate. DFEH clarified that actually there would be about 50 ovitraps placed at each of the 38 places and so the coverage would be quite large. He said that the ovitraps were to monitor the trend of mosquito breeding in these places, and the target areas covered those favouring the harbourage of mosquitoes or in close proximity to human activities. PS(HWF) added that the Anti-mosquito Steering Committee would keep under review the adequacy of the number of ovitraps in the territory.

Manpower for anti-mosquito work and the hotline service

17. Ms Cyd HO asked about the adequacy of manpower for anti-mosquito work. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) replied that at present about 200 staff were deployed to carry out anti-mosquito work. Starting from November 2002, some 200 additional workers would be employed through out-sourcing contracts and each district would have about ten additional staff for anti-mosquito work which would continue in the coming year.

18. Ms Cyd HO said that many people had complained that they could not get through FEHD's hotline for enquiries or lodging complaints against the lack of action on sites with accumulation of stagnant water. There were also complaints about the lack of action by FEHD after the lodging of complaints. She asked if it was possible for FEHD to provide a designated hotline for anti-mosquito work. The Chairman suggested that the Administration might consider providing more telephone lines for enquiries and complaints, and deploy more staff to follow up the complaints received. DFEH agreed to consider the suggestions.

Adm

19. Ms Cyd HO also requested the Administration to step up publicity on the symptoms of dengue fever and the need for people to seek medical advice if in doubt. She also suggested that the Administration should conduct tests on mosquito repellents and provide advice to the public on the use of them.

Adm

20. Dr LO Wing-lok asked whether the Administration had adequate manpower to conduct extensive clean-up operations covering all the black spots in every district, and whether there would be sustained efforts in this respect.

21. DFEH responded that it would be an impossible task for the Administration alone to take up the anti-mosquito work over the territory. He said that it was important for the community to participate in mosquito prevention and control, and the Administration would strengthen publicity and public education in this connection. He added that the relevant departments would step up the surveillance of and inspections to potential breeding places such as construction sites, and prosecutions would be taken where necessary. The departments would also strengthen liaison with contractors regarding anti-mosquito work at construction sites.

22. DFEH further said that at present, priority was given to inspecting common parts of private tenement buildings. This would be followed by a clean-up operation in rural areas and the Lunar New Year clean-up.

23. Dr LO suggested that the Administration should maintain a database on all the black spots of mosquito breeding places in Hong Kong to facilitate staff deployment to clean up those places.

24. DFEH responded that the Administration already had some information on the black spots, and the current database would be strengthened with the information collected through the provision of more ovitraps in 2002. The Administration also maintained a record of those constructions sites and construction companies which had been prosecuted.

Screening of blood infected with dengue fever

25. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether there were any measures to prevent patients requiring blood transfusion from receiving dengue fever-infected blood. DD(H)1 responded that Hong Kong had adopted international standards in the testing and screening of blood and blood products. He explained that under the existing system, a health history check was conducted for blood donors who were also requested to report any illnesses they suffered before and after giving blood. The Administration was of the view that the present mechanism was adequate in ensuring safe blood supply in Hong Kong. He pointed out that no other places in the world had introduced screening of blood infected with dengue fever.

26. In view of the large number of dengue cases in Thailand, Mr WONG asked whether there were cases in Thailand where the disease was contracted through blood transfusion. DD(H)1 replied that the patient who contracted dengue fever through blood transfusion in Hong Kong was apparently the first reported case in the world and this case had been reported to WHO. He reiterated that the blood transfusion service in Hong Kong complied with the safety standards and requirements stipulated by WHO.

Import control of plants/fruits

27. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concern that the plants or fruits imported from places with high incidence of dengue fever might carry *Aedes albopictus* eggs which would start breeding in Hong Kong. The Chairman shared Mr CHEUNG's concern and pointed out that it was easy for Hong Kong residents to bring in plants or fruits from other places. He suggested that the Administration should consider stepping up control at the border crossing points, and disinfection for plants brought into Hong Kong.

28. PS(HWF) responded that whilst the Administration could step up inspections of plants, it was also possible for small mosquitoes and their eggs to attach to luggage and goods. For more effective control, she called on the public to be vigilant and cooperate with the Administration in the mosquito prevention and control work.

29. In response to Mr Tommy CHEUNG, C(CM) said that mosquito eggs could stand drought, and they could survive for months by attaching to any object. However, they had to breed in water and it took some seven days for them to develop into adult mosquitoes.

30. C(CM) further said that the Administration had noted the possibility for mosquitoes and their eggs being brought into Hong Kong through cargoes and goods. Therefore, the Administration had stepped up preventive work by conducting more stringent checks to ships, aeroplanes and cargoes arriving at Hong Kong, and the shipping companies were also asked to be vigilant in this respect. He added that to step up the monitoring work, more ovitraps had been placed in the area of the control points.

Government land managed by the Lands Department (LD)

31. The Chairman considered that Government land under the management of Lands Department (LD) had the most serious mosquito problem. He said that some people such as morning walkers carried out unauthorised cultivation or planting at the hillside and left behind buckets of water which could lead to breeding of mosquitoes. However, LD did not seem to have adequate staff to tackle the problem. As he had mentioned at the Panel meeting on 2 October 2002, FEHD and LD should make serious efforts to eliminate the problem of accumulation of stagnant water on Government land. He urged that the Anti-mosquito Steering Committee should follow up the matter with LD and carry out clean-up operations as soon as possible.

32. PS(HWF) responded that the Anti-mosquito Steering Committee was set up to improve the coordination amongst departments and to map out a comprehensive territory-wide strategy on anti-mosquito work. She said that LD was also a member of the Steering Committee and it had undertaken to strengthen the anti-mosquito work on the Government land under its management.

33. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:45 am.