



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

Your Ref: CB2/PL/FE

15 August 2016

Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Josephine SO)
[Fax: 2509 9055]

Dear Ms SO,

Request for Discussion on Infestation of Biting Midges

Thank you for the Panel's letter to the Secretary for Food and Health on 8 June 2016 relaying to us the letter from Hon Chan Han-pan concerning the captioned matter. The reply from this Bureau is as follows:

According to records, there are around 55 00 species in 60 genera of biting midges worldwide. In Hong Kong, 57 species in 8 genera have been recorded. *Lasiohelea taiwana* and *Culicoides circumscriptus* are examples of the species commonly found in Hong Kong. Biting midges are not known to be major vectors for mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis and Zika virus infection.

Eggs of biting midges are usually laid on the surface of mud or wet soil, especially those with plenty of decaying plant materials. Biting midge larvae are aquatic or semi-aquatic. They are most active in shade and in dense vegetation. Adults have very short flight ranges, usually less than 100 meters from their breeding grounds. They are fragile and

in general do not prefer living in an environment with adequate sunlight or with wind speed of more than 5.6km/hour.

Infestation of biting midges is seasonal and localized. The peak season for biting midge activities usually occurs in the humid and warmer months each year. Scrubby areas with lots of decaying vegetation are their typical habitats. Specific environmental control actions in these areas targeting at reducing their breeding places can effectively control infestation of midges. In response to the biting midge problems which recently prevail, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will continue to monitor the infestation of biting midges in public places through various channels, including regular inspection carried out by frontline staff and handling of complaints. FEHD will enhance its control measures as and when necessary.

FEHD has advised the relevant government departments, such as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Highways Department, Housing Department and Education Bureau, to strengthen control over biting midges in areas under their management (e.g. parks, roadside slopes, housing estates and schools). Where the infestation of midges occurs at private places, FEHD stands ready to provide technical advice to the relevant parties that would help them carry out effective measures for controlling biting midges.

In addition, FEHD has strengthened its efforts to educate the public on how to prevent and control biting midges infestation. For example, FEHD is disseminating information to stakeholders in housing estates and schools, helping to enhance the effectiveness of their endeavours to control and prevent midges, hence minimizing the nuisance caused by biting midges. Members of the public may visit the website of FEHD for more information on the control of biting midges.

Routine anti-mosquito work and environmental improvement measures carried out by FEHD such as removal of fallen leaves, decaying vegetation, silt in sand traps and surface channels help control infestation by reducing the number of breeding places for midges. Considering the seasonal and localized nature of the infestation of biting midges, FEHD will work hand in hand, before the peak season of biting midges activities (i.e. warm and humid seasons of each year), with other relevant departments and carry out environmental control work targeting at reducing breeding places of biting midges at more crowded locations where there are lots of decaying plants. Where necessary, fogging will be conducted at the infested areas in order to minimize the nuisance, and

FEHD also carries out environmental improvement measures to remove possible breeding places for midges.

To further enhance the control of biting midges, FEHD invited Professor Yu Yi-xin of China, renowned for studying biting midges, to visit Hong Kong in late June this year for conducting studies and provide guidance in understanding the distribution of midges in the territory, as well as in identifying the species that caused the most nuisance to the public. During the visit, Professor Yu inspected and collected samples from various locations. He confirmed that the species of *Lasiohelea* caused the most nuisances during daytime. On 29 June 2016, an exchange session was held between Professor Yu and a number of professors from local universities, as well as representatives of the local pest control trade and FEHD colleagues. Thereafter, Professor Yu also met with the press to explain the biology of biting midges, the importance of public hygiene and the methods that may be used for controlling midges.

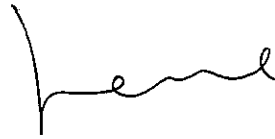
The current control measures adopted by FEHD are the same as those adopted by countries worldwide, including those adopted by Mainland China. These measures aim at environmental control by minimizing wet soil habitats that are suitable for the breeding of biting midges, in particular *Lasiohelea*. Professor Yu acknowledged the efficacy of such measures.

According to our understanding, other places like the Mainland, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore as well as countries in America and Europe have not formulated any surveillance programmes for biting midges. The measures adopted in other places to control biting midges mainly take the form of environmental control measures and personal protection measures, and are largely the same as those adopted in Hong Kong. The World Health Organization has not published guidelines for systematic surveillance of biting midges. FEHD will remain vigilant in monitoring the situation of biting midges infestation in Hong Kong. We will maintain close liaison with nearby places. In formulating its strategy for controlling biting midges in Hong Kong, FEHD will take into account the opinion of the experts in this field, as well as the best practice employed elsewhere.

At the Legislative Council meeting on 8 June 2016, the Secretary for Food and Health had provided substantive responses to the written questions raised by Hon Chan Han-pan and Hon Chan Hak-kan and highlighted the abovementioned measures that are being taken by FEHD

to control the infestation of biting midges. Hence, it begs the question of whether further discussion of the subject at the Panel is called for.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irene Cheung', with a stylized, cursive script.

(Irene CHEUNG)

for Secretary for Food and Health