

**For information on
5 May 2003
(Special Meeting)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON EDUCATION

Combating Atypical Pneumonia in Schools – Class Suspension and Resumption Arrangements and Related Support Services

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the class suspension and resumption arrangements made by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and its support services to schools for the prevention of the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (also known as “Atypical Pneumonia” (AP)) in schools.

BACKGROUND

2. Since last March, the spread of AP has aroused worldwide concern and caused a significant impact on the health and living of the public as well as the economy and education of Hong Kong. In this connection, a central task force was set up in EMB in mid-March. The task force has established a liaison mechanism with the Department of Health in order to maintain close liaison and monitor the latest developments for the formulation of contingency plans as appropriate. On the other hand, the task force also plans and co-ordinates AP-related works within EMB to provide schools with updated news and the most suitable support services.

DATES OF CLASS SUSPENSION AND RESUMPTION

3. In response to the development of the situation and after consulting the Department of Health, various educational bodies as well as representatives of parents, EMB has taken a number of contingency measures since mid-March. On 23 March 2003, EMB issued the “Guidelines on the Prevention of the Spreading of Atypical Pneumonia in Schools” to provide clear guidelines to schools on civic education, precautionary measures, alert measures and

contingency measures. On 27 March 2003, EMB announced that all kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools in Hong Kong would suspend classes from 29 March 2003 to 6 April 2003. Subsequently, in view of the unstable situation in the community, class suspension was extended to 21 April 2003. Having regard to the concerns of parents, classes are being resumed in phases in an orderly manner. The dates of class resumption are listed below -

Secondary Schools (S3 and above)	: 22 April 2003 (Tuesday)
Secondary Schools (S1 & S2)	: 28 April 2003 (Monday)
Primary Schools (P4, P5 & P6) Special Schools (except Special Schools for Mentally Handicapped Children) (P4 and above)	: 12 May 2003 (Monday)
Primary Schools (P1, P2 & P3), Special Schools (P3 and below), Special Schools for Mentally Handicapped Children, Kindergartens	: 19 May 2003 (Monday)

CONSULTATION EXERCISE AND REASONS FOR CLASS RESUMPTION

4. Apart from obtaining public views on the arrangements for the suspension and resumption of classes through our hotline service set up in March this year, we have also held consultations with the councils of primary and secondary schools, kindergartens and special schools, Committee on Home-School Co-operation, and federations of parent-teacher associations. In addition, we have sought the opinions of different stakeholders through diverse channels such as seminars for school principals, District School Development Office as well as the school network. To sum up, parents and schools generally support the resumption of classes by phases in an orderly manner. The reasons are as follows -

- (a) Class suspension cannot prevent the spread of AP. To avoid infection, the most effective means is to maintain good personal and environmental hygiene and step up precautionary measures;

- (b) With the implementation of a series of monitoring and “quarantine” measures by the Government, the number of new cases, discounting those which involve health care workers and residents of Amoy Gardens, has become stable. Moreover, by way of publicity on various fronts, public awareness of the dangers of AP has been greatly increased; and
- (c) As AP would not disappear in the short term, suspension of classes for an indefinite duration is not practicable, as this would affect the study and emotional state of students. Through home-school cooperation and stepped-up precautionary measures, a safe learning environment can be provided to allow students to return to normal life.

CLASS SUSPENSION AND RESUMPTION ARRANGEMENTS

5. In order to help schools to cope with the arrangements for class suspension and resumption appropriately, detailed guidelines and circular memoranda have been issued for schools’ reference. All schools are requested to set up an ad-hoc crisis management team to handle matters concerning the suspension and resumption of classes with reference to our guidelines and in accordance with the **principle** of being “Student-centred, School-based, Professionally-led, Flexible”. **In respect of class suspension**, the “suspension of classes, not school; suspension of classes, not learning” principle is followed, with a view to taking care of students who return to school during the class suspension period and providing stay-at-home students with self-learning guidance during the period.

6. **In respect of class resumption**, EMB has formulated clear guidelines on precautionary measures, parent education, case follow-up, administrative matters, etc. The focus is to call on home-school cooperation for the provision of a safe learning environment for students. On the one hand, parents are urged to take their children’s temperature before going to school and remind their children to wear facemasks in school. On the other hand, schools are required to provide liquid soap, paper towel and chlorine tablet in the toilets and conduct cleaning and disinfection every day. Moreover, schools are strongly advised to make use of this incident to enrich students’ knowledge of contagious diseases, draw their attention to the importance of personal and environmental hygiene,

enhance their civic awareness, and strengthen their ability to combat crisis and shoulder community responsibility.

7. To facilitate schools in formulating school-based preventive measures, we have consolidated various circular memoranda and guidelines into the “Handbook on Prevention of the Spreading of Atypical Pneumonia in Schools”. This handbook has been uploaded to EMB’s homepage. In addition, we have set up **dual preventive measures** for schools to tie in with the home confinement measures of the Department of Health (DH) -

Dual Preventive Measures	Scenarios	Actions
Class suspension	DH advised that a staff member / student of the school is confirmed / suspected to have contracted AP	<p>EMB announces class suspension of the school for 10 days with effect from the first day of sick leave taken by the concerned staff member / student</p> <p>If the suspected case turns out to be non-AP, DH will inform the EMB to arrange class resumption as soon as practicable</p>
Home confinement/ Home observation	DH advised that a family member / friend in close contact* with the staff member / student is confirmed / suspected to have contracted AP	<p>DH informs the staff member / student concerned to stay away from school for home confinement / home observation for 10 days</p> <p>If the suspected case turns out to be non-AP, DH will inform the concerned staff member / student as soon as possible that he / she can return to school</p>

- * “Close contact” means having taken care of the SARS patients, lived with them or had direct contact with their respiratory secretions.

SUPPORT SERVICES

8. Besides distributing the “Prevention of Atypical Pneumonia” leaflets to schools and parents and uploading all circular memoranda and guidelines to EMB’s webpage, we have set up eight hotlines to answer the inquiries of schools and parents. We have also published the Reminder for Parents, and publicized widely through radio, television and newspaper in order to disseminate information to parents and students through various channels and thus ensure all preventive measures are properly taken so that parents have the confidence to let their children attend school. Moreover, we have set up the “**Daily Bulletin on Combating Atypical Pneumonia**” section in EMB’s webpage to provide information on the number of AP cases in Hong Kong and in schools, as well as the latest news, frequently asked questions and their answers, and sharing of experiences about combating AP in schools.

9. **In respect of support services**, apart from providing hotline services, EMB officers have kept in touch with schools during the class suspension period to remind them to take proper precautionary measures and to allow students to return to school if they have such a need. Arrangements have also been made for health inspectors to inspect schools prior to class resumption. Moreover, on-site support was provided to all secondary schools on the first day of class resumption. As for teaching materials, EMB has compiled on-line teaching information to facilitate self-learning for students during the class suspension period. In addition, guidelines on preventing the spreading of AP in learning and teaching activities (e.g. physical education, arts education, science education and technical education) have been drawn up. Teaching materials on related subjects including civic education and common knowledge as well as interdisciplinary subjects have been produced for primary and secondary schools. A series of guidance activities in support of “Schools against SARS Campaign” has also been designed for primary school students to strengthen their ability to combat crisis.

10. **In respect of anti-AP materials**, EMB has already provided anti-AP materials, including facemasks, ear thermometers and probe covers to primary, secondary and special schools in batches. We will provide kindergartens with ear thermometers, probe covers and facemasks suitable for small children. To

combat AP, schools have to incur additional expenditure, e.g. for purchasing liquid soap and paper towel and employing additional staff for cleaning the school premises. EMB has obtained a funding of \$100 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to subsidise schools in Hong Kong in their fight against AP. Schools receiving the subsidy include public schools, private non-profit-making primary and secondary schools, kindergartens and international schools. Each school will receive an **Anti-AP Allowance** of \$5,000 to \$20,000 per month based on the number of classes in the school. Each school can apply for the allowance for three months, with the total amount of allowance ranging from \$15,000 to \$60,000. In addition, EMB has also advised schools to deploy and use various school funds flexibly to meet the anti-AP expenses.

11. **In respect of administrative measures**, to cope with the arrangements for class suspension and resumption, EMB has cancelled the requirement of submission of the Primary 6 Second Term Internal Assessment scores by primary schools. In this case, the allocation bands of all Primary 6 students in their respective school nets will be determined by their scaled Primary 5 Second Term and Primary 6 First Term Internal Assessment scores. Moreover, the schedule for the secondary school places allocation has been revised and the release of allocation results has been re-scheduled for 15 July 2003. As regards the Junior Secondary Education Assessment, the deadline for the submission of annual reports of Secondary 3 students will be extended to 11 July 2003. The allocation results for Secondary 4 places will also be extended to 12 August 2003. The above arrangements will help relieve the pressure on parents and schools. In order to reduce the impact of class suspension on the learning of students, EMB has requested schools to deduct the number of days of class suspension from the school holidays (90 days per school year). In this connection, schools may have to start their summer vacation on a later date. However, schools with special arrangements may submit the details of the arrangements to EMB for retention provided that the arrangements are justified for the benefit of students and agreed by the representatives of teachers, the parent-teacher association and the school management committee.

Education and Manpower Bureau

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