Local

Doctors wait as Suen taken out of intensive care

Phila Siu

Education chief Michael Suen Ming-yeung has been transferred from the intensive care unit of Queen Mary Hospital for a private ward.

Unit head Chan Wai-ming said yesterday it is difficult to tell how long Suen will have to remain in hospital.

"Legionnaires' disease can be very dangerous, but the present situation is satisfactory," Chan said.

"The disease itself may not affect a patient's working ability, but the full impact cannot be ascertained until all his body functions are checked."

Suen is now breathing normally, his fever has subsided and his condition is satisfactory.

Chan said the condition of older patients suffering from both Legionnaires' and kidney disease may be complex, but they do not necessarily have carry-over affects after recovery.

Suen has taken both sick and annual leave and is scheduled to return to work on January 3.

Undersecretary for Education Kenneth Chen Wei-on will be taking care of business while his boss is recovering.

Suen, 67, developed fever, a cough and shortness of breath a week ago and was admitted to the hospital on Sunday.

Rita Chung

He was transferred to the intensive care unit the following day.

On Wednesday he was diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease.

Suen and his family visited Dongguan, near Guangzhou, between December 10 and 11.

Yesterday his wife, Rita Chung, brought food to the hospital to celebrate the Winter Solstice. She said doctors suspected Suen had Legionnaires' disease the day he was admitted.

When asked if she thinks Suen should retire, she said it is a decision only he can make, adding that he is being treated by excellent doctors.

Officers from the Centre for Health Protection and Electrical and Mechanical Services Department went to the home of Suen in Happy Valley and his office at the Tamar government headquarters to take samples of water for analysis.

Close contacts were found not to be carriers of the disease.

Suen was found to have a kidney problem in April, and has said he needs dialysis at home several nights a week. He insisted his condition would not affect his work and there was no need for a kidney transplant.

Political commentator Ma Ngok said Suen should resign as it will be better for his health and the government.

phila.siu@singtaonewscorp.com

Business is quiet for a Kowloon City chicken vendor as flu fears take their toll on the usual spike in sales during the Winter Solstice. CHAN CHUN-KEI

Chicken vendors fail to make festive killing

Rio Lau

Vendors of chilled poultry trying to make the most of a chicken cull saw their hopes for heady profits vaporize yesterday.

That is because avian flu fears, which spiked after a chicken carcass tested positive for H5N1 at the Cheung Sha Wan wholesale market on Tuesday, caused shoppers to leave the traditional staple out of their Winter Solstice reunion feasts.

Some of the vendors had expected demand to spike after the diseased chicken put paid to sales of live birds for the time being and raised their prices.

Even the more reasonable vendors suffered.

"We raised our price for a chilled chicken by only HK$5 to HK$55 as people were scared of the avian flu," said a spokeswoman for Pak Ho Meat. "But we only sold 50 in the morning."

She blamed the more unreasonable traders, such as in Shau Kei Wan, where prices ranged from HK$45 to HK$140 yesterday.

But chicken vendors were not the only ones hurting.

Fishmonger Wong Chi-fa said he raised the price of prawns from HK$88 to HK$120 a catty while keeping the price of fish the same.

"I brought in 10 percent more fish and seafood than usual but sales were poor," he said.

The ban on imports and sales of fresh chicken is in force for 21 days.

A spokeswoman for the Shenzhen Inspection and Quarantine Bureau said farms are being checked and disinfected. There will be more random spot checks.

Officials are still trying to trace the source of the diseased chicken.

On Wednesday, the government raised the avian flu alert to "serious" and ordered the cull of 17,000 chickens at the wholesale market.

Also eating into demand for Winter Solstice feast favorites was inflation, with housewives finding it difficult to prepare proper meals for the occasion.

Chu Yin-kum used roast pork instead of chicken to pray to her ancestors.

"Food prices have increased by 10 percent compared with just a few days ago," said Chu, adding she was surprised to find that even bean sprouts cost HK$70 a catty.

staff.reporter@singtaonewscorp.com