

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**SB033**

**(Question Serial No. 0688)**

Head: (45) Fire Services Department

Subhead (No. & title): ()

Programme: (3) Ambulance Service

Controlling Officer: Director of Fire Services (YEUNG Yan-kin, Andy)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Security

Question:

The fifth wave of the epidemic has put strain on the ambulance service of the Fire Services Department, as reflected by a marked increase in its major service indicators, such as the numbers of emergency calls, turnouts to calls and emergency move-ups of ambulances to provide operational coverage. In this connection, would the Government advise this Committee on the following:

1. What is the staff establishment and wastage rate of ambulance personnel in the past 3 years? What is the number of recruits planned for the coming year?
2. Of the emergency ambulance service provided this year, what is the percentage of calls related to the COVID epidemic in the total number of calls?
3. In respect of each handled call related to the epidemic, what is the average number of personnel and vehicles turned out, as well as the average time taken for arriving at the scene and handling the case?
4. What are the details of the protective equipment currently provided for each of the personnel for tackling the epidemic, and the proportion of the provision for acquisition of protective equipment to that of Programme 3 in the coming year?
5. What is the number of ambulance personnel needed to be quarantined or confirmed with infection as well as the average number of days they were absent from duty, and the percentage of all such absent personnel in the total number of ambulance personnel as a result of handling calls related to the epidemic in the past 3 years (please provide a breakdown by month)?
6. In view of the slippage of performance in service delivery for emergency calls as compared to the same period of last year, what measures are the Government planning to take to improve the performance in the coming year in addition to increasing manpower so that the existing pressure on the handling of ambulance calls can be relieved?

7. How does the Government assess the effectiveness of first responder as a paramedic ambulance service with reference to the service indicators in Programme 1? For example, of the emergency ambulance calls in 2021 which saw a significant growth as against 2020, how many, in percentage terms, were related to the epidemic? Why does the Government substantially reduce the estimated number of calls in its targets for the coming year to 26 000 despite the likelihood of the epidemic to persist for some time? Will this add a much heavier burden to ambulance service? In what ways will the Government cope with the situation?
8. What is the work progress towards the goal to “explore the long-term arrangement for the provision of emergency ambulance service” for the coming year?

Asked by: Hon LEUNG Hei, Edward (LegCo internal reference no.: 7)

Reply:

1. The establishment and wastage of personnel of the Ambulance Stream of the Fire Services Department (FSD) in the past 3 years are tabulated below:

	2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	
	Establishment	Wastage	Establishment	Wastage	Establishment	Wastage*
Ambulance Stream (including Programmes (1), (2) and (3))	3 207	128	3 309	127	3 325	139

\*As at 28 February 2022

The FSD expects to recruit 88 personnel of the Ambulance Stream in 2022-23.

2. The number of emergency calls handled by the FSD in 2021 was 715 194, of which 8 883 emergency calls were related to COVID-19, accounting for 1.24% of the total number of emergency calls.
3. Each COVID-19 related call is handled by one ambulance and three ambulance personnel. In 2021, the average Arrive-at-Scene (ARA) time and the handling time of an ambulance call related to COVID-19 (i.e. the time from the receipt of an ambulance call by the Fire Services Communications Centre to the completion of patient handover procedures at hospital by the ambulance personnel, but excluding the time taken for ambulance disinfection) are tabulated below:

	Average ARA time (minutes)	Average handling time (minutes)
Emergency calls#	9.32	66.68
Hospital transfer calls	19.82	95.79
Non-emergency calls	39.24	126.38

# The FSD’s performance pledge is to have ambulance personnel to arrive at scene within the target response time of 12 minutes for 92.5% of all emergency calls.

4. The FSD provides all frontline personnel with protective gowns, surgical masks, N95 respirators, head-band type tight-fitting goggles, disposable face shields, disposable caps, gloves and rubber boots for handling ambulance calls related to COVID-19. For 2022-23, the FSD has earmarked \$17.43 million specifically for procuring personal protective equipment, accounting for 0.69% of the provision for Programme 3.
5. During the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021, 10 ambulance personnel of the FSD were confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 while 190 ambulance personnel needed for quarantine. The average number of days of their absence from duty were around 15.3. The number of such personnel absent from duty accounted for approximately 6.02% of the total number of ambulance personnel.

From 1 January 2022 to present (3 March 2022), the accumulated number of infected ambulance personnel is approximately 500, constituting around 15.04% of the total number of ambulance personnel. As the epidemic is expected to continue for some time, details of relevant statistics (e.g. the number of ambulance personnel needed for quarantine, the average number of days of their absence from duty, etc.) are subject to verification.

6. The FSD will continue to closely monitor the demand for emergency ambulance service (EAS) and review relevant resources from time to time to meet operational needs. If necessary, the FSD will seek additional resources through the existing resource allocation mechanism to augment manpower and other resources.
7. The FSD will review the arrangement of first responder service from time to time under the premise that operational efficiency and the patients' benefit will not be affected. At present, the FSD dispatches fire personnel who are qualified as first responder to attend cases of cardiac arrest, choking, severe breathing difficulty, massive bleeding, loss of consciousness and other life-threatening conditions. They provide immediate basic life support to the patients before the arrival of ambulances, so as to increase their chance of survival. In 2021, the FSD handled a total of 33 578 first responder service cases, of which 0.45% involved patients infected with COVID-19. The FSD estimates that the number of emergency ambulance calls to be attended by first responders in 2022 is 26 000, representing an increase of 8.3% as compared to 24 000 in 2021. The FSD will deploy resources flexibly to cope with the impact brought by the recent fifth wave of the epidemic.
8. The FSD attaches great importance to the planning of EAS especially in tackling the challenges posed by an ageing population and the impact of COVID-19. Apart from continuously optimising resource management and utilising big data to enhance the efficiency in management, the FSD has also commissioned a consultancy firm to study the demand for EAS in the long run. In 2011 and 2015, the FSD commissioned a consultancy firm and the Efficiency Unit (EU) respectively to conduct comprehensive reviews on the demand for EAS in Hong Kong and the roles of ambulance personnel. The consultancy firm and the EU made a number of recommendations in areas including support for frontline personnel, service quality assurance and allocation of additional resources. The FSD made reference to these recommendations and made appropriate deployment of ambulance resources, with a view to providing efficient, effective and

advanced EAS to the public. Amidst an ageing population and the ever increasing demand for ambulance services, the FSD commissioned a consultancy firm in 2021-22 for conducting a comprehensive review and study on the future development of EAS, and updating the findings of a similar study in 2011, so as to explore the long-term arrangements for EAS. The study commenced in July 2021 and is expected for completion in the second quarter of 2022.

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**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**SB032**

**(Question Serial No. 0898)**

Head: (45) Fire Services Department

Subhead (No. & title): ()

Programme: (3) Ambulance Service

Controlling Officer: Director of Fire Services (YEUNG Yan-kin, Andy)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Security

Question:

There has been a shortage of manpower on various work fronts due to the large number of confirmed cases of infection since the outbreak of the fifth wave of the epidemic. Would the Government inform this Committee of:

1. the total number of ambulances and ambulance personnel serving the territory in the past 1 year; and whether additional manpower was recruited in the past 1 year in response to the fifth wave of epidemic; if yes, of the details.

Asked by: Hon CHOW Ho-ding, Holden (LegCo internal reference no.: 10)

Reply:

The overall establishment of ambulanceman of the Fire Services Department (FSD) in the past year (as at 31 December) under Programme (3) Ambulance Service is tabulated as follows:

	<b>2021</b>
Establishment of ambulanceman #	3 122
Establishment of ambulance*	465^

# Including the establishment of staff of each region and the establishment of staff with non-operational duties

\* Including town ambulances, light ambulances, cross country ambulances and mini ambulances

^ 22 of them are ambulances additionally procured and are currently in transit

In response to the epidemic, the FSD recruited 22 Contract Ambulance Services Assistants I (Contingency Support) and 1 Contract Ambulance Services Assistant II (Contingency Support) to serve in the Hospital Transfer Fleet to assist in transferring confirmed elderly patients residing in residential care homes for the elderly and handling non-emergency transfer cases to relieve the pressure on emergency ambulance service. The FSD will

continue to closely monitor the demand for emergency ambulance service and review relevant resources from time to time to meet operational needs.

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