

CE addresses public on stabilisation of fifth wave of epidemic early (with photo/video)

Following is the video address by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, to members of the public today (February 28) on the stabilisation of the fifth wave of the epidemic early:

Dear fellow citizens,

Last week, Hong Kong recorded a total of some 117 000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Since the onset of the current wave of the epidemic on December 30 last year, the accumulative total has surged to over 158 000, which is an alarming 12 times more than all confirmed cases recorded in the past two years. As we have seen, this highly transmissible Omicron variant has been ravaging the whole world, leading to exponential growth in infections.

In the face of such an unprecedented and challenging epidemic situation, I am grateful to the people of Hong Kong for staying calm, complying with our various anti-epidemic measures, undergoing compulsory testing in an orderly manner, working from home and going out less. The low people flow in the city over the recent past weekends is testimony to the unity of you all in fighting the epidemic.

Hong Kong has been strictly implementing the strategy of "preventing the importation of cases and controlling the spread of the virus in the community" and endeavouring to contain the virus by a multi-pronged approach, comprising "early identification, early isolation and early treatment" of the infected in pursuit of "dynamic zero infection". To tackle the fifth wave of the epidemic, my Government has been putting in substantial resources to enhance our capacity on various fronts, yet the rapid deterioration of the epidemic has sadly outgrown our existing capacity.

At this critical juncture, as the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), I have submitted a report to the Central Government appealing for national support and outlining specific requests. The Central Government is deeply concerned about the epidemic situation of Hong Kong and the well-being of the Hong Kong people. Our requests have promptly met with positive response, with all relevant parties in the Mainland mobilised and co-ordinated in addressing the needs of Hong Kong. More and more support measures are being rolled out, including sending to us three batches of experts in epidemiology and critical care medicine, mobile testing vehicles, testing technicians and nucleic acid testing personnel; commissioning Mainland construction teams to construct community isolation and treatment facilities in the Lok Ma Chau Loop area and at eight other locations in Hong Kong; ensuring medical supplies, donating to us anti-epidemic Chinese medicines, and ensuring supplies of fresh food and daily necessities.

As always, the Central Government provides us with strong backing and unwavering support, and with this, the HKSAR Government will steadfastly act in accordance with the important instruction of President Xi Jinping: we will assume the primary responsibility to stabilise the epidemic situation early and treat this as the overriding mission at present; we will mobilise all available manpower and resources and adopt all necessary measures to safeguard the lives and health of Hong Kong people and the stability of society.

Fellow citizens, the coming two to three months is crucial to controlling the epidemic. I announced on February 22 to step up our anti-epidemic efforts in five aspects.

First, to ensure "early identification" and "early isolation", the Government is distributing more rapid antigen test kits for wider use in the community so that members of the public could know early whether they or their family members have been infected. We will also conduct more "restriction-testing declaration" operations targeting higher-risk buildings. Meanwhile, we are refining the details of the Compulsory Universal Testing to be launched within March in order to cut virus transmission chains in a thorough, speedy, orderly and effective manner.

For those residents who have tested positive, given the huge number of cases, the Government will adopt a triage measure by arranging for patients' admission to community isolation facilities or hospitals according to their health conditions, living environment, their household family members and other factors, and will render special assistance to those citizens still at home pending admission to isolation facilities or undergoing home isolation. These include hotline for health enquiries, designated clinics for consultations by booking and transport services by designated taxis. Meanwhile, the Government is pressing ahead at full steam to provide more community isolation facilities. In addition to the existing isolation facilities at Penny's Bay and Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, extra community isolation and treatment facilities which will come into operation in phases include those from three converted unoccupied buildings in the public housing estates and two sizeable transitional housing projects, rented commercial hotels as well as those constructed at eight sites and in the Lok Ma Chau Loop area. It is expected that a total of over 70 000 units or beds will be provided. The first such facility in Tsing Yi has been completed in a week's time for handover on February 28.

Second, we must adopt a targeted approach to reduce severe cases and deaths. When compared with other strains, infection with Omicron shows milder symptoms, and hospitals should be reserved for those confirmed cases that are severe or require treatment. To enhance Hong Kong's treatment capability, the Central Government has assigned a Mainland construction team to build a hospital for contingency use in the Lok Ma Chau Loop area.

Third, we have to continue with the strict border control measures such as the place-specific flight suspension in order to prevent imported cases from posing additional pressure on our healthcare system at this crucial juncture.

Fourth, tightened social distancing measures have to be in place to significantly reduce people flow and prevent the spread.

Fifth, we need to raise the vaccination rate, especially among the elderly and children.

Fellow citizens, my Government will continue to mobilise all available manpower and resources and adopt all necessary measures to fight the epidemic, but to win this fight, the support from each and every one of you is the key to success. With your full co-operation, I am sure our efforts will achieve much greater effects, our limited resources will go much further and we will be in one spirit to fight this epidemic. May I once again strongly appeal to you all to observe the following: first, to pay more attention to personal hygiene to reduce the risk of infection. If you have doubt about your health conditions, you should take a rapid test as soon as possible for early identification of infection, if any, to protect your family members; second, to continue to comply with social distancing measures, avoid going out unnecessarily and joining gatherings, and discuss the rest day arrangement with your foreign domestic helpers employed and appeal to them to stay home; third, to observe the requirements of "restriction-testing declarations" and the soon-to-be-launched Compulsory Universal Testing to undergo testing in a timely manner; fourth, to get the jab as soon as possible and arrange vaccination for your elderly and children family members; and fifth, if you are confirmed and have only mild or no symptoms, you should comply with the health authority's triage and isolation arrangements so that the valuable ambulance and hospital treatment services can be reserved for those with greater needs.

Fellow citizens, Hong Kong is a city we all love. She has encountered innumerable challenges and conquered countless difficulties with immense resilience, while retaining tremendous strengths. We are now faced with a merciless epidemic and critical situation; but with the staunch support of our country, I have no doubt that Hong Kong will be able to ride out the storm again and win this battle, so that our people could resume their normal lives.

