

CE appeals to people to support new direction in fighting pandemic

â€‹The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, together with the relevant Directors of Bureaux and a department head, held a press conference today (April 12), where she noted that with the fourth wave of the epidemic which has emerged since the second half of November last year apparently under control, a new direction in fighting the pandemic will be adopted down the road. Elucidating the adjustment of various anti-epidemic measures with "vaccine bubble" as the basis, she appealed to members of the public to get vaccinated sooner rather than later so that Hong Kong can gradually return to normality, and the flow of people with the Mainland and overseas can be restored as soon as possible.

"During the months-long fourth wave of the epidemic, the Government's strategy of 'preventing the importation of cases' has successfully stopped the virus variants from entering the city, and the spread of the disease in the community has been curbed with its enhanced capabilities. We will adopt a new direction in fighting the pandemic to restore the city to normality in a gradual and orderly manner, and aim to achieve the goal by refraining from using a 'stop and go' approach, reinforcing infection control measures in a targeted manner and reiterating the need for concerted community efforts," she said.

Mrs Lam said that in response to the aspirations of various sectors and members of the public, the Government will adjust social distancing measures with "vaccine bubble" as the basis. Taking the operation of restaurants as an example, if all the staff members have received their first vaccine dose and all the customers are required to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app, some operation restrictions can be relaxed in the relevant premises; if all the staff members and customers have completed the vaccination (i.e., after 14 days following the administration of two vaccine doses for production of antibodies), the relevant premises can delineate a specified area where operation restrictions can be further relaxed.

Under the concept of "vaccine bubble", six types of premises which are currently required to be closed (including bars or pubs, bath-houses, party rooms, clubs or nightclubs, mahjong-tin kau premises and karaoke establishments) can resume operation gradually having regard to their business nature. Since these six types of premises have been closed for business for a relatively long period of time, the Government will support them with one more allowance round under the Anti-epidemic Fund 4.0, involving about \$400 million.

"Other relaxation measures that can be considered under the concept of 'vaccine bubble' may also cover visits of public hospital patients and residents of residential care homes for the elderly; quotas and venues of religious activities, weddings, annual meetings of companies, etc; and local

tour groups and more. The relevant policy bureaux will liaise with the trades and announce the details later," she said.

She said that the convenience brought about by vaccinations can also be applied to cross-boundary travel, including shortening the quarantine period of persons arriving in Hong Kong from low-risk and medium-risk places; allowing vaccinated Hong Kong residents to take part in an Air Travel Bubble or enjoy the convenience of shortened or no quarantine for overseas travel or business trips offered by foreign governments.

In addition, the Government plans to expand the Return2hk Scheme for Hong Kong residents returning from Guangdong Province to other places in the Mainland by the end of April, no matter whether they are returning through the land-based boundary control points or the Hong Kong International Airport. The Government also plans to launch a new scheme to allow non-Hong Kong people entering Hong Kong from the Mainland without the need to undergo the 14-day compulsory quarantine, further restoring the flow of people between the two places. The Guangdong Provincial Government has agreed to allow cross-boundary goods vehicle drivers who have completed their vaccination to continue to be exempted from quarantine and relax the virus-testing requirement gradually, from once every day to once every three days.

"By proposing a new direction in fighting the pandemic, I intend to give a clear path for the fight against the virus at the next stage, helping the community to build a consensus and to work together. The work direction announced today is not a relaxation of policy, it aims to be more targeted, for example, the circuit breaker mechanism of civil flights will be further tightened to prevent the virus variants from entering Hong Kong and provide a more concrete incentive for people to get vaccinated. I appeal to members of the public to protect yourself and others, support the new direction in fighting the pandemic and get vaccinated as soon as possible to help Hong Kong get through the epidemic," Mrs Lam said.