

# Government strives to ensure supply of surgical masks

Given the severe situation of the novel coronavirus infection, a Government spokesman said today (January 29) that sufficient and stable supply of equipment for health protection is of paramount importance. In view of the keen demand for surgical masks by members of the public and their tight supply owing to the Chinese New Year holidays or other reasons, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government is working proactively to increase the overall supply of surgical masks through a multi-pronged approach, striving to maintain a stable supply.

In particular, representatives of the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and relevant government departments met members of local chambers of commerce and the retail industry today to learn more about the situation of the supply of surgical masks and problems encountered by importers and retailers, with a view to offering assistance to them and addressing the current tight supply.

The spokesman said that the HKSAR Government is maintaining close contact with the Mainland authorities. Customs departments between the two places are collaborating to follow up on the clearance of surgical masks procured by the Government or the market so as to speed up their delivery to Hong Kong. The Government Logistics Department is also actively sourcing globally. It has contacted more than 140 suppliers from over 10 countries, striving to procure more surgical masks to cope with the epidemic.

The spokesman added that the supply of surgical masks in the market will still be tight in the near future. As advised by experts, people should go out less often during this period of time and observe personal hygiene. The HKSAR Government has announced a package of measures to prevent people from gathering and contacting. They include extending the Chinese New Year holidays of all schools in Hong Kong, introducing special work arrangement for government departments and appealing to private sector organisations to make flexible work arrangements likewise, closing some of the government facilities such as leisure and cultural facilities and suspending recreation and sports programmes, as well as adjusting services subsidised by the Social Welfare Department. In fact, although today is the first working day after the Chinese New Year holidays, there is obviously less people on the street when comparing to normal working days. The HKSAR Government appeals to members of the public for their understanding of the inconvenience caused by the relevant measures and the inadequate supply of protective equipment. It also appeals to the community to work together in disease prevention and control at this critical moment.

At the same time, Hong Kong Customs has launched a large-scale territory-wide special operation since January 27 to combat surgical masks with false origin claims, non-compliance with consumer goods safety standards and false trademarks to protect safety and rights of the public. The

operation will continue.

The spokesman said the Government noticed some members of the public are rushing to buy food. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has confirmed with the major suppliers that the supply of food products remains normal, and the suppliers will replenish the shelves of food products as soon as possible. The spokesman stressed that the suspension of services at some control points announced yesterday will not affect freight services, so food supply to Hong Kong will not be affected. The Government will maintain communication with the sector to ensure smooth supply of food.