

HKSAR Government spares no effort in fighting epidemic

In response to the recent media enquiries about the high-level organisation and leadership of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in its fight against the epidemic, a spokesman for the Government stressed that the HKSAR Government will steadfastly assume the primary responsibility in fighting the virus, and that under the anti-epidemic mechanism led by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, the Secretaries of Departments and the Directors of Bureaux will continue to work in concert in shouldering the various anti-epidemic responsibilities to stabilise the epidemic situation early.

The spokesman said that as early as January 4, 2020, the HKSAR Government launched the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance upon the emergence of the novel coronavirus and activated the second-highest Serious Response Level under the plan. The response level was then escalated to the highest Emergency Response Level on January 25 upon the first confirmed case of infection in Hong Kong, with the Chief Executive leading an inter-departmental Steering Committee cum Command Centre to formulate strategies and initiatives having regard to the epidemic developments henceforth. The three-tier response level was established by the HKSAR Government based on the experience of tackling the SARS epidemic back in 2003 and triggered in Hong Kong's fights against the various infectious diseases emerging from time to time. To strengthen the science-based anti-epidemic work, the Chief Executive appointed on the same day an expert advisory panel of four experts to advise the HKSAR Government on such areas as public health, epidemiology and clinical experience. In the light of each wave of the epidemic over the past two-odd years, the Steering Committee cum Command Centre has held a total of 120 cross-departmental high-level meetings while the expert advisory panel has had 27 meetings with the Chief Executive.

It is worth mentioning that although the public health crisis is about the lives of the people and time sensitive, in Hong Kong being a society upholding the rule of law, the HKSAR Government shall lay a solid legal foundation for each and every of its measures. The HKSAR Government included the COVID-19 in the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Chapter 599 of the Laws of Hong Kong) as early as January 2020 to provide a legal basis for its anti-epidemic work down the road. Under the Ordinance, the Executive Council has enacted a total of 10 specific regulations for the prevention and control of the epidemic, covering entry and cross-boundary restrictions, provision of personal data, operation of premises, group gatherings, wearing of masks, virus testing, use of vaccines and the "vaccine pass". Also, the Emergency (Exemption from Statutory Requirements) (COVID-19) Regulation enacted by the Executive Council last month has laid a legal basis for the Mainland support to Hong Kong's anti-epidemic efforts.

To cope with the severity of the fifth wave of the epidemic and to

ensure the effective implementation of the anti-epidemic measures supported by the Central Authorities, the Chief Executive has assigned special tasks to individual Directors of Bureaux upon the scrutiny by the inter-departmental Steering Committee cum Command Centre. They are requested to personally lead the relevant anti-epidemic work, mobilise the departments under their purview and be held accountable to the Chief Executive. The designated anti-epidemic tasks led by the 13 Directors of Bureaux are listed at the Annex to facilitate contact by different sectors of the community and the media.

Mrs Lam said, "Upon the outbreak of the new wave of the epidemic with confirmed cases on the rise, each and every measure adopted by the HKSAR Government has been serving to safeguard the lives and safety of members of the public but the execution involved has outgrown the HKSAR Government's own capability. We are deeply grateful to the Central Authorities for its sincere care. Leveraging their support, the whole Government shall work as a team to keep on enhancing the implementation of the various anti-epidemic measures in order to win the anti-epidemic battle as early as possible for the stability of Hong Kong."