

## LC Urgent Q1: Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak

Following is an urgent question by the Hon Alice Mak under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (February 19):

Question:

As the authorities suspected that the cause for a tenant in Hong Mei House of Cheung Hong Estate in Tsing Yi being infected with the novel coronavirus recently was that a pipe of the toilet in the tenant's unit had not been sealed up, arrangements were made for around a hundred tenants in the building to live in quarantine centres temporarily. Has the Government laid down criteria specifying the circumstances under which mandatory closure of certain premises and temporary evacuation of the residents therein will be warranted; if not, whether it will forthwith do so; furthermore, whether the Government will immediately send officers to inspect those public housing units whose sewerage system is of a design similar to that of Cheung Hong Estate, with a view to preventing recurrence of similar incidents which will increase the risk of the virus spreading; besides, given that the outbreak has continued to aggravate, with an increasing number of people who are subject to quarantine or isolation, whether sufficient number of quarantine and isolation centres are in place and what are the related details (including the number of places as well as the status of their usage and demand); and whether there are plans to requisition other facilities or premises, etc. for quarantine and isolation uses in an effort to increase supply to meet the demand?

Reply:

President,

First of all, on behalf of the Government, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the President for convening today's meeting and allowing us the opportunity to respond to Members' questions regarding the Government's work on handling the virus outbreak. I would also like to thank all the attending Members as well as the Legislative Council Secretariat staff and colleagues who have helped arrange this meeting.

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus infection, the Government has been closely monitoring the development of the situation and responded comprehensively with decisive and appropriate measures. In accordance with the Government's prevention and control strategies, we have introduced specific measures in the areas of health surveillance, compulsory quarantine, isolation treatment, health declaration, exit screening, reducing the flow of people between Hong Kong and the Mainland, enhancing "social distancing" locally, supporting front-line healthcare staff and provision of sufficient

personal protective equipment.

Today, 11 Directors of Bureaux and I stand ready to answer Members' questions on the Government's work in disease prevention and control, demonstrating that we attach great importance to our relation with the Council and the principle of working in an open and transparent manner. I will first respond to the questions raised by Hon Alice Mak, explaining the Government's follow-up work in relation to a confirmed case of novel coronavirus infection at Hong Mei House of Cheung Hong Estate in Tsing Yi and reporting on the arrangements for quarantine and isolation facilities.

Under the existing mechanism, if there is a cluster of infection in the same building or premises, or in adjacent buildings or premises, and environmental factors are suspected to have contributed to the spread of the disease concerned, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) will coordinate with the relevant Government departments and organisations and activate the "Multi-disciplinary Response Team" to investigate and examine if environmental factors are involved in the infection cases. If the investigation results show that environmental factors may have caused the spread of the disease, CHP will arrange for an asymptomatic resident be evacuated to a quarantine centre as a prudent infection control measure. Meanwhile, a symptomatic resident will be sent to a hospital for treatment.

Regarding the infection cases involving residents living at Hong Mei House of Cheung Hong Estate in Tsing Yi with the same orientation but on different floors, a Multi-disciplinary Response Team was immediately activated by CHP after detecting the cluster of infection cases. The Housing Department (HD) also took the initiative to inspect the units that shared the same dung channels or sewers and vent pipes with the units with infection cases. HD would conduct repairs to the pipes and vents concerned as appropriate during the inspection process.

In fact, buildings with Trident block design under the Housing Authority were completed from 1984 to 1991, and the sewage facilities, including the vent pipe in the toilet, met all the prevailing legal requirements as well as environmental hygiene and safety standards. There are no design issues involved. Hong Mei House is one of the buildings with Trident block design. The vent pipes connecting to the sewage drainage pipe are an indispensable part of the drainage system. There may be health risks if a resident improperly modifies the vent pipe in the toilet without making a formal application for the Housing Authority's approval for alteration work.

For the cases of Hong Mei House, HD found that the household concerned on the lower floor had performed modifications to the pedestal toilet by cutting off the vent pipes connecting to the toilet without the Housing Authority's approval. HD has posted notice to remind tenants that prior approval must be obtained from the Housing Authority before any alteration work can be carried out. In addition, unauthorised modification of the pipes may also violate the Buildings Ordinance and/or breach the terms of the tenancy. If a tenant is concerned about the drainage pipe condition, or

whether the modification of the pipes would pose any health risks, he/she can contact the relevant estate office for appropriate follow-up.

With regards to quarantine facilities, the Government is currently operating four quarantine centres for putting asymptomatic close contacts of confirmed cases under compulsory quarantine. The four quarantine centres are the Lady MacLehose Holiday Village, the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, the Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp and the Heritage Lodge of the Jao Tsung-I Academy. They can provide 150 units in total. In view of the rapid development of the outbreak, including the recent successive occurrence of local infection cases, coupled with the increasing proportion of close contact persons among confirmed cases and the immediate evacuation for the purpose of disease investigation of infection cases, the usage rate of the quarantine centres is very high. As at 9am on February 18, over 80 per cent of the units of the four quarantine centres were in use.

In view of the development of the outbreak, the Government has endeavoured to look for more suitable sites and set up quarantine facilities in full steam. In view of the latest development, it is estimated that the Chun Yeung Estate in Fo Tan will soon commence operation as a quarantine centre, providing more than a thousand quarantine units in total. In addition, the Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre (JPC Centre) in Pat Heung, Yuen Long can be used as a quarantine centre shortly. On the other hand, we have been constructing additional units at the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and the JPC Centre respectively, providing some additional 600 units in total. The relevant works are expected to be completed within April.

At the same time, the Government continues to look for other suitable sites for setting up more quarantine facilities. Among others, we will make use of a piece of Government land of four hectares at Penny's Bay to provide at least 600 quarantine units. In addition, we are following up with the Walt Disney Company which has agreed to explore the use of another site at Penny's Bay reserved for future tourism development for constructing quarantine facilities.

As regards isolation facilities, as at noon on February 18, public hospitals were using about 937 isolation beds with an utilisation rate of about 30 per cent. In response to the changes in the situation, the Hospital Authority is carrying out internal alteration work at the Infectious Disease Centre of Princess Margaret Hospital to provide more isolation wards.

Thank you, President.