

## LCQ15: Quarantine arrangements

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 2):

Question:

Earlier on, the Government implemented stringent quarantine arrangements for initially confirmed or confirmed cases involving variants of the Coronavirus Disease 2019, including transferring all residents of the buildings concerned to the quarantine centres for a 21-day compulsory quarantine. It has been reported that various problems arose during the evacuations, including that staff members at the scene failed to answer residents as to when they would be transferred to the quarantine centres, calls to the enquiry hotline remained unanswered for a long time, residents had to wait for a prolonged period of time before staff members conducted door-to-door specimen collections for virus testing and arranged their transfer to the quarantine centres, and some residents had not yet been issued quarantine orders a number of days after they had been transferred to the quarantine centres. It is learnt that one of the reasons for the slow evacuation process was the cumbersome procedure for issuing quarantine orders: staff members at the scene took pictures of the personal data of the residents and then sent such pictures to the Contact Tracing Office (CTO) via instant messaging apps; staff members at CTO then performed word processing work, compiled name lists and handed over such name lists to relevant government departments (including the Customs and Excise Department, the Immigration Department and the Hong Kong Police Force) for verification; finally, the quarantine orders prepared were delivered to doctors of the Department of Health at the evacuation spots for issuance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that relevant government departments have held an inter-departmental meeting to sum up the experience gained from the aforesaid operations with a view to formulating measures to improve the arrangements, of the details of the experience summed up and the improvement measures;
- (2) of the measures in place to enable staff members at the scene to grasp timely and accurate quarantine information for disseminating to residents who are required to undergo quarantine; and
- (3) whether it has reviewed the arrangements for issuing quarantine orders at the evacuation spots; if so, of the review outcome and the improvement measures; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been taking comprehensive and effective measures to combat the COVID-19 epidemic. In general, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) arranges close contacts of confirmed cases to be sent to designated quarantine centres to undergo quarantine. Quarantine helps to cut the community transmission chain as far and as early as possible, and is extremely important in safeguarding the well-being and interests of our community as a whole.

My consolidated reply to the three parts of the question raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

(1) The Government has been attaching great importance to the safety and quality of food in the quarantine centres. In light of the experience gained from recent large-scale operations, the DH has re-examined the arrangements, including tendering requirements, logistics and meal distribution, regarding the catering provision for quarantine centres with a view to further securing food safety and quality. Taking into consideration the location of the catering service provider, delivery time and arrangement, and the provider's relevant experience on provision of meals for quarantine centres, the DH has engaged Cathay Pacific Airways as the catering service provider for the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre (PBQC) to provide three meals a day for PBQC starting from May 24, 2021.

Specific provisions outlining the quality required for the catering service provider, including meal variety, portion size, storage temperature and hygiene, were included in the contract. Furthermore, the Civil Aid Service (CAS) will be procuring additional equipment to assist its frontline staff at the quarantine centres in performing their duties, which could further guarantee timely delivery of meals to the rooms of quarantinees.

With regards to the internet connection issue, making reference to the statistics on data usage, the DH will provide free data sim cards with larger capacity to quarantinees. On the other hand, to further improve the wireless network at PBQC, the Food and Health Bureau is proposing the installation of an additional radio base station at PBQC. Consultation with relevant departments on the detailed implementation plan is in progress, and works are expected to commence by June the earliest.

With regards to the maintenance and repair of the quarantine centres, the DH is currently conducting improvement works at PBQC, including retrofitting works on the existing quarantine units with a view to providing more family rooms for families under quarantine. In addition, to further improve the environment at quarantine centres, the Architectural Services Department will carry out improvement works at Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village from June to August 2021. The scope of works includes the installation and improvement of water proofing provisions, renovation of existing facilities.

In response to an upsurge in quarantinees that need to be transferred to PBQC in the large-scale evacuation operations, the Auxiliary Medical Service, the CAS and the DH had immediately deployed additional manpower and

supporting staff to cope with and expedite the evacuation process in order to minimise the waiting time. The CAS had also immediately enhanced the hotline support service by increasing the original six hotlines to 16 hotlines to cope with the needs of the quarantinees.

(2) and (3) Close contacts, in general, are sent to designated quarantine centres to undergo quarantine by vehicles arranged by the CHP of the DH. Upon the receipt of information of the quarantinees, the CHP will arrange escorting as early as possible. Notwithstanding this, owing to the large number of evacuees and enormous demand for transportation vehicles in the simultaneous evacuation operation for multiple buildings, challenges were encountered on the transfer of the evacuees. The actual transfer time might also be affected by other factors, for instance, the arrangement for pet-sitting.

Collaboration of different departments, including the District Offices of the Home Affairs Department, the DH and the Hong Kong Police Force are required for evacuation operations. The DH will maintain communication with the various departments to enhance exchange of information, thus ensuring that an accurate evacuee list, number of evacuees and their corresponding quarantine centres could be ready quickly, such that the issuance of quarantine orders and subsequent admission to quarantine centres could be arranged as early as possible. In order to expedite data collection and enhance data accuracy, the DH is studying the use of auxiliary equipment, including identity card readers and QR codes, to enable frontline staff to collect and verify information by electronic means, and input data to the Case Handling and Information Sharing Portal, so as to expedite the evacuation process.

The Government attaches great importance to the quarantine arrangement for close contacts. The DH has deployed additional manpower to cope with large-scale evacuation operations, and will closely monitor the situation and timely arrange corresponding and sufficient manpower for the relevant preparation work. The DH will continue to work closely with relevant government departments to ensure the smooth evacuation and admission of quarantinees to quarantine centres.