

LCQ2: "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app and electronic vaccination records

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, in the Legislative Council today (July 14):

Question:

On the basis of "vaccine bubble", the Government has implemented less stringent social distancing measures for those persons who have received vaccination against the coronavirus disease 2019 (vaccination). Moreover, members of the public may scan the QR codes on their paper or electronic vaccination records (collectively referred to as vaccination records) to store the vaccination records in the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application for checking by the persons-in-charge of scheduled premises or law enforcement officers when necessary. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that a single vaccination record can be stored in more than one "LeaveHomeSafe" accounts since the procedure for storing vaccination records does not involve identity authentication, whether the Government will plug this loophole as soon as possible and step up the verification of the identity of the holders of vaccination records on those premises the entry to which is restricted to persons who have received vaccination, in order to avoid a gap in epidemic prevention; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will weigh afresh the importance of epidemic prevention against that of protection of personal privacy, and suitably incorporate identity authentication and tracking functions in the "LeaveHomeSafe" application; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will expedite the discussion with the Mainland authorities the establishment of a mechanism for mutual recognition of the electronic vaccination records of the two places (including allowing Hong Kong's "LeaveHomeSafe" application and the Guangdong Province's "Yuekang Code" application to mutually recognise and store the vaccination records of the two places), in order to assist in striving for an early resumption of normal traveller clearance between Hong Kong and the Mainland; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Over the past three months, the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) Government has adopted the new direction in fighting against the epidemic as announced on April 12. Under the basis of "vaccine bubble",

social distancing measures are relaxed with a view to responding to the aspirations of various trades and the public to resume normal business and daily lives as soon as possible. In the light of the stabilisation of the local epidemic situation and the steady increase of vaccination rate, the social distancing measures under the second phase of "vaccine bubble" already took effect on June 24.

With regard to Dr the Hon Lo's question, in consultation with the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB), my replies are as follows:

(1) Under the "vaccine bubble", members of the public are required to present vaccination records and use the "LeaveHomeSafe" when entering certain designated venues. On June 1, 2021, the Government launched the "LeaveHomeSafe" version 2.0, which added the new function of storing electronic vaccination, providing members of the public with an additional way to store and for display if necessary. In response to the public's concern over personal privacy, users of the "LeaveHomeSafe" can use the app without registering any personal information. Similar to visit records, the electronic vaccination records stored in the app will only be saved in the user's mobile phone and will not be uploaded to any other systems. The app will verify the authenticity of the QR code when the user stores the electronic vaccination record. However, the app cannot verify whether the user is the owner of the vaccination record, nor whether the vaccination record has been stored on other mobile devices.

Same as the paper vaccination record with personal data, the QR code of the electronic vaccination record also contains personal data. When designated law enforcement agencies, such as the staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, conduct inspections and enforcement operations, they will check the personal data in the QR code and authenticate the QR code content to verify the identity of the QR code holder if necessary. Members of the public should properly keep their paper and electronic vaccination records. They should not causally send such information to others, share them on social media, save their own vaccination records to other people's "LeaveHomeSafe", nor to save other people's vaccination records to their own "LeaveHomeSafe". We will continue to remind the public through various channels not to break the law by using other people's electronic vaccination records or fake vaccination records.

Meanwhile, according to the directions issued under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), operator(s) of catering business premises or manager(s) of scheduled premises are required to use the "QR Code Verification Scanner" mobile app provided by the Government to scan the customers' QR codes for COVID-19 vaccination records for checking whether the customers have complied with the relevant requirements. Relevant responsible person or manager who contravene the statutory requirements would have committed a criminal offence and subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months. In addition, the Government has amended Cap. 599F to enhance deterrence by requiring persons who are present at any catering business premises or scheduled premises to comply with the

requirements applicable to them. Non-compliance with the relevant requirements would be an offence and offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000. In particular, if the relevant person makes false declarations or provides false information, that would be regarded as non-compliance with the requirements and he/she would be subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000. Relevant departments will also step up enforcement of the anti-epidemic regulations, including ensuring that customers present authentic COVID-19 vaccination records.

(2) Through the "LeaveHomeSafe", the Government alerts potentially infected individuals to raise awareness and get tested as early as possible. Since the launch of the app, the number of downloads has so far exceeded 4.8 million. About 91 000 public and private venues have participated in the scheme to display the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code for members of the public to scan and record their visits. About 310 confirmed patients uploaded their visit records from their mobile phones to the Center for Health Protection through the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app. In addition, more than 57 000 users went to community testing centers for free testing upon receipt of exposure notification.

As I have mentioned earlier, the "LeaveHomeSafe" does not require registration of any personal information and does not have a tracking function nor recording of any geographical location information of the user. We believe that the current arrangement is effective in striking a balancing between the need for epidemic prevention and the public's concern for personal privacy.

(3) Spearheaded by the CMAB, the HKSAR Government has been communicating and liaising closely with the governments of Guangdong Province and the Macao Special Administrative Region on measures for epidemic prevention and control in three places. In order to facilitate early resumption of normal cross-boundary flow of people amongst the three places in an orderly manner, the HKSAR Government will on the one hand continue to closely monitor and control the epidemic situation, and to speed up vaccination for members of the public. Meanwhile, we will maintain close liaison with the Guangdong Province and the Macao Special Administrative Region to actively explore the resumption of normal cross-boundary activities amongst the three places in a gradual and orderly manner, on the premise that the epidemic situation in the three places is under control and without posing additional public health risks.

For those who have received COVID-19 vaccination outside of Hong Kong (including the Mainland), apart from the vaccines recognised for use in Hong Kong, vaccines on the World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Use Listing or Pre-qualification lists, vaccines recognised for use by Stringent Regulatory Authorities as designated by the WHO or the National Medical Products Administration, as well as vaccines recommended by the Joint Scientific Committee joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel are also accepted for the arrangements under the "vaccine bubble" (including measures for social distancing and border control). The Government has uploaded the list of relevant vaccines to the COVID-19 thematic website, and will update the list from time to time.

For those who have completed vaccination outside of Hong Kong with the vaccines concerned, currently they can present their vaccination records issued by the relevant local authorities to meet the requirements for shortening of compulsory quarantine period under the "vaccine bubble". Furthermore, the FHB has been studying the inclusion of vaccination records of Hong Kong citizens who have received vaccination outside of Hong Kong, by way of declaration, to digitally input the records into the Government's vaccination record database. A QR code on the vaccination record will be provided to them to facilitate their entry into catering businesses premises or scheduled premises where the relevant requirements regarding COVID-19 vaccination are applicable. By then, these people can use the "LeaveHomeSafe" to scan the QR codes, and store their vaccination records and QR codes in their mobile phones.

Besides, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer is enhancing the functionality of the "Hong Kong Health Code" system so that the vaccination records stored in the Government's vaccination record database will be added to the "Hong Kong Health Code". In the future, members of the public can conveniently use the health code's conversion function to submit the required information to enter Guangdong and Macao for the applications of their health codes. The relevant system will be put into service when the scheme is launched.

Thank you, President.