

## LCQ2: Mutual recognition system for health codes of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 24):

Question:

The authorities of the Mainland, Macao and Hong Kong are separately implementing measures to put inbound travellers under compulsory quarantine. Some Hong Kong businessmen who need to frequently commute between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as those Hong Kong people who reside on the Mainland but work in Hong Kong have relayed that the quarantine measures have seriously affected their work and family lives. The authorities of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao are taking forward a system for mutual recognition of health codes (mutual recognition system) to facilitate cross-boundary flow of people between the three places amid the epidemic. Under the mutual recognition system, holders of a health code containing certification of negative result of the nucleic acid test on coronavirus disease 2019 issued within seven days by a designated medical institution may be exempted from compulsory quarantine on arrival in the three places. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the latest progress of the implementation of the mutual recognition system by the authorities of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao; whether the authorities will expeditiously increase the quota for the Hong Kong health code under the mutual recognition system, with priority being accorded to the following people: those who need to commute between the three places on business, work, study, humanitarian or special grounds; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) whether it will expeditiously increase the capacity of local medical institutions in conducting the nucleic acid test under the mutual recognition system and the test quota, as well as subsidise the private sector for providing testing services, so as to lower the test fees payable by members of the public; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus epidemic, the Government has been closely monitoring the development of the situation and responding comprehensively with decisive and appropriate measures. Currently, in view of signs that Hong Kong's epidemic situation is subsiding, the Government adopts the "suppress and lift" strategy, striving to strike a balance among factors

such as public health protection, economic impact and society's acceptance level, with a view to maintaining various anti-epidemic measures on one hand while allowing room for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities in society when the situation permits.

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

Guangdong and Hong Kong are closely connected and there are frequent economic and trade activities between the two places. Currently, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in Guangdong Province has relatively subsided. In view of this and in line with our "suppress and lift" strategy, relevant policy bureaux and departments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government are actively discussing with the relevant departments of Guangdong Province the related arrangements under the framework of joint prevention and control. Regarding the mutual recognition of virus test results and exemption of designated cross-boundary travellers from compulsory quarantine, the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong are considering the launch of a pilot scheme to relax cross-boundary flow of people between the two places within certain limits in order to facilitate people who need to travel between Guangdong and Hong Kong.

Currently, the pilot scheme being discussed between the governments of the Hong Kong SAR and Guangdong Province is expected to include the following arrangements:

\*In the initial phase of the pilot scheme, the number or coverage of persons eligible for exemption from quarantine will be subject to restrictions. If there is a quota on the number of persons, we will consider a suitable mechanism for allocating the quota, such as through an open booking system. Furthermore, exempted persons must not have left Hong Kong or Guangdong in the past 14 days preceding their departure.

\*The governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong will mutually recognise the COVID-19 test results conducted by designated testing facilities which meets the standards. The mutual recognition will be done through the "Health Code" of the two places. In relation to this, one of the preparatory tasks of the Hong Kong SAR Government is to develop a "Hong Kong Health Code" system, which enables the virus test results of participants of the pilot scheme in Hong Kong to be uploaded onto the code. Before departing from Hong Kong, eligible persons with negative test results can connect to the electronic platform through a web browser using smartphones or mobile devices, and apply for the "Hong Kong Health Code" online and download it to their mobile phones or devices. To facilitate the mutual recognition of test results by the boundary control officers of Guangdong and Hong Kong, participants of the pilot scheme can on their own accord choose to exchange the "Hong Kong Health Code" for use on the "Yuekang Code" system of Guangdong for health declaration purpose when they enter Guangdong. Eligible persons arriving at Hong Kong from Guangdong can also choose to use the code exchange function on the "Yuekang Code" to directly transfer the valid nucleic acid test results onto the platform for filling in the electronic health declaration form for entering Hong Kong.

\*Furthermore, exempted persons must undertake nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 at private hospitals, clinics or medical laboratories recognised by the Hong Kong SAR Government, and must be tested negative. To facilitate the aforesaid arrangement for mutual recognition of tests, the Hong Kong SAR Government has been encouraging and helping local private laboratories to enhance their testing capabilities for COVID-19, as well as bringing down the price by increasing market competition. At the same time, with a view to lowering the price of testing, we are working with the private testing sector to actively explore ways to lower the cost as much as possible while upholding the testing standards.

We will announce the details as soon as possible after the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong have completed discussion on the pilot scheme.

In addition, the Government is discussing with the Macao SAR Government the arrangement for mutual recognition of virus test results and exemption of cross-border travellers from compulsory quarantine. Details will be separately announced after the discussion has completed.

Thank you, President.