

LCQ20: Vaccination requirements for persons arriving in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 25):

Question:

In accordance with the current requirements of the Government, all persons arriving in Hong Kong from foreign places have to provide recognised vaccination records, and the types of vaccines administered as well as the places or organisations issuing the vaccination records must respectively be on the "List of COVID-19 Vaccines Recognised for Specified Purposes" (List of Recognised Vaccines) and the "List of Places or Organisations of Issuance of Recognised Vaccination Records" (Recognised List). There are views pointing out that even though the Government has relaxed the infection control requirements since the 1st of this month to allow non-Hong Kong residents to enter Hong Kong, it has not concurrently expanded the respective scopes of the List of Recognised Vaccines and the Recognised List. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the average time taken from the commencement of the negotiation to the conclusion of an agreement between the Government and each of the places or organisations on the recognition of vaccination records since the introduction of the Recognised List;

(2) of the places or organisations with which it is negotiating on the recognition of vaccination records, and whether it has anticipated (i) the respective time needed for reaching relevant agreements and (ii) the number of recognised places or organisations that can be added by the end of this year;

(3) as it is learnt that a number of vaccines not included on the List of Recognised Vaccines have been granted full authorisation or emergency authorisation for use by quite a number of countries or places, whether the Government has plans to include such vaccines on the List of Recognised Vaccines; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) given that if the vaccination records currently held by Hong Kong permanent residents are not issued by the places or organisations on the Recognised List, they cannot board any flights for Hong Kong even though the vaccines that they have administered are approved by the Government, whether the Government has plans to relax the entry requirements for these residents shortly, such that they will be allowed to board the flights for Hong Kong irrespective of their places of departure and the places or organisations issuing the vaccination records; if so, of the details and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The global epidemic situation is still ongoing. Hong Kong continues to prevent the importation of cases under the policy direction of dynamic "zero infection", and implements stringent prevention and control measures for persons arriving from overseas places. Under the prevailing inbound control measure requirements, all persons arriving from overseas places can only board a flight for Hong Kong if they are fully vaccinated and hold recognised vaccination records.

Recognised vaccination records include (1) vaccination records issued by Hong Kong, (2) vaccination records or certifications issued by Mainland or Macao authorities or an institution recognised by Mainland or Macao authorities (including Chinese Embassies or Consulates General overseas), (3) vaccination records or certifications issued by an authority or recognised institution of a country where its national regulatory authority is designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a stringent regulatory authority (SRA), (4) vaccination records or certifications issued by a relevant authority or recognised institution of a country with which Hong Kong has reached a recognition agreement arrangement with its government, or (5) vaccination records issued by an organisation with which Hong Kong has reached a recognition agreement arrangement. In respect of (3), the 27 member states of the European Union (EU) are countries where their national regulatory authorities have been designated by the WHO as SRAs, and the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EU DCC) mechanism has already been implemented among EU member states. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government also accepts vaccination records recognised under the EU DCC mechanism as recognised vaccination records required for the purpose of boarding flights for Hong Kong from overseas places.

Fully vaccinated persons means persons who have received the necessary doses as stipulated in guidelines of a COVID-19 vaccination course 14 days prior to their arrival in Hong Kong. The vaccines administered for the relevant persons have to be vaccines listed on the Government's List of COVID-19 Vaccines Recognised for Specified Purposes.

As for lifting the ban on non-Hong Kong residents (non-HKRs) entering Hong Kong, the Government explained when announcing the arrangement earlier that the relevant restriction was originally intended to limit the volume of inbound passengers from overseas places, but considering that the public health risk associated with non-HKRs is the same with that of HKRs coming from the same places, that the overall volume of inbound passengers is controlled by the number of designated quarantine hotels (DQHs), and that overseas inbound passengers are still subject to stringent inbound control measures, the Government, under the premise that the risks could be properly managed, has allowed non-HKRs who have stayed in overseas places in the past 14 days to enter Hong Kong and be subject to the same boarding, quarantine and testing arrangements as HKRs, and to undergo compulsory quarantine in

DQHs under closed-loop management upon arriving at Hong Kong.

The reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government has been in discussion with various places on the arrangements for the recognition of vaccination records. In general, the HKSAR Government would invite Consulates General of various places to provide relevant information on their vaccination records, including samples of vaccination records, brands of vaccines locally administered, verification methods of vaccination records, whether digital or paper-based records are issued, etc. Consulates General of some places would also proactively approach the HKSAR Government to provide the above information. As the time taken for the governments or the Consulates General of various places to provide the above information varies, the time taken for the HKSAR Government to conduct discussions with the Consulates General of various places is also different. In general, upon the provision of aforementioned information by the Consulates General, subject to review and verification, the HKSAR Government would recognise the concerned records, and would update and announce the List of Places or Organisations of Issuance of Recognised Vaccination Records accordingly.

As of May 25, 2022, the List of Places or Organisations of Issuance of Recognised Vaccination Records has included 116 places or organisations of issuance of recognised vaccination records, including the vast majority of places which have frequent contact with Hong Kong, including the Mainland, Macao, Australia, Canada, member states of the EU, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, etc. As per the figures of visitor arrivals in Hong Kong in 2019, over 95 per cent of visitor arrivals were from places which are currently on the List. On the other hand, the Government is still waiting for the replies from around 20 places regarding information on vaccination records.

(3) As regards the List of COVID-19 Vaccines Recognised for Specified Purposes (the List), apart from the COVID-19 vaccines already recognised for use in Hong Kong, vaccines on the 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 Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel are also listed. In fact, in addition to the two COVID-19 vaccines made available in Hong Kong, according to the latest statistics from Our World in Data, vaccines recognised and used by other major countries/economies have already been included in the List. In other words, for the purpose of inbound travels, Hong Kong has recognised nearly all COVID-19 vaccines which are widely used in the world. As regards formulating the above definition for the List, it is to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccines included are safe, efficacious and of good quality. The Government has uploaded the List to the COVID-19 thematic website, and will update the List from time to time.

(4) Under the premise of maintaining the measures to prevent the importation of cases and proper management of risks, the arrangement of recognised vaccination records can help confirm the authenticity of vaccination records held by inbound persons, and provide clarity to inbound persons on the format of records recognised.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation of different places in accordance with the principle of guarding against the importation of cases. A basket of factors, including public health factors such as epidemic situation in particular places, testing rate, vaccination rate, volume of arrivals and actual imported cases, as well as the developments of the local epidemic situation and relevant local socio-economic factors, will be considered under the risk-based principle to adjust the boarding, quarantine and testing requirements for overseas arrivals based on risk levels as the situation warrants.