

## LCQ21: Staff of catering businesses receiving vaccination

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (August 25):

Question:

Some members of the catering businesses have relayed that while most of the table-service section staff in catering business premises who are responsible for receiving customers have received vaccination against COVID-19 (vaccination), the production-section staff (including kitchen staff) who are responsible for preparing and cooking food have relatively low vaccination rate. On the other hand, quite a number of production-section staff have pointed out that it is excruciating for them to wear surgical masks while working in high-temperature kitchens. In this connection, will the Government consider relaxing, based on the "vaccine bubble" principle, the relevant anti-epidemic stipulations to the effect that production-section staff who have received vaccination are only required to wear plastic transparent masks which are more breathable, so as to encourage such staff to receive vaccination; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Tommy Cheung is as follows:

The global COVID-19 epidemic situation is under serious threat from the Delta variant, with acute surges in the number of confirmed cases within a short period of time in many countries. Despite large-scale vaccination programmes, many places are also experiencing resurgence of the virus, which poses enormous challenges to our local anti-epidemic efforts. While the local vaccination rate has been increasing steadily, it is far from the level required to prevent imported cases from spreading in the local community.

To this end, there is a need for us to implement social distancing measures to prevent the transmission of the virus in the community. In particular, wearing of masks by members of the public is integral to the prevention of the transmission of COVID-19 in the community. In fact, the World Health Organization and public health authorities of other places also appeal to persons who have completed a vaccination course to, especially in environments with high risks of transmission, continue wearing masks and adopting other infection control measures, with a view to reducing the transmission of the virus.

The various restrictions and requirements imposed under social

distancing measures, including those under the "vaccine bubble" arrangements, are drawn up having regard to the public health risks involved in the relevant activities. Furthermore, in considering the infection control measures that the relevant premises must comply with, we need to take into account the emerging scientific researches regarding COVID-19 and its variants. In respect of eateries, their operation involves higher risks in nature, given that customers within the premises are consuming food or drinks hence mask-off most of the time. Therefore, we consider that it would not be appropriate to relax the mask-wearing requirement within catering business premises at this juncture. Having regard to the development of the epidemic situation, progress of the vaccination programme and implementation of the measures under "vaccine bubble", we will continue to review and suitably adjust the relevant measures from time to time.

According to the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) (Cap. 599I), mask includes any covering designed or made to be worn over the nose and mouth to provide the wearer protection against infections or air pollution. To fulfil the mask-wearing requirement, relevant persons must wear a mask over and covering the persons' nose and mouth, with the mask touching the persons' nose, chin and cheeks.