

LCQ6: Anti-epidemic gears of Police

Following is a question by the Hon Dennis Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (April 22):

Question:

It has been reported that in a number of recent operations to transport patients confirmed to have been infected with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 or persons who might have been infected to hospitals and quarantine centres, despite the fact that healthcare personnel (including doctors, nurses and ambulancemen) faced a higher risk of infection than police officers, the former only wore blue isolation gowns which were of lower protection specifications while the latter wore "Tyvek" isolation gowns which were of higher protection specifications. Some members of the public have queried that such situation has reflected the Government's serious mismatch of resources and reckless disregard for the safety of patients and healthcare personnel. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current quantities of personal protective equipment (PPE) of the various types of specifications stocked by the Police, with a breakdown by the unit which is in possession of the stock; the unit costs and total value of such equipment;

(2) whether it has formulated guidelines setting out, in respect of PPE of each type of specifications, the circumstances under which such PPE may be used by police officers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as some healthcare personnel have pointed out that the current stock of PPE in public hospitals is only sufficient for one-month consumption, whether the Government has any mechanism to re-allocate such PPE in the Police's possession to frontline healthcare personnel for use; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Under section 10 of the Police Force Ordinance (Cap 232) and section 10 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap 599), the Police have a duty to assist the Department of Health (DH) in implementing anti-epidemic measures and fighting against the virus. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Police have been working steadfastly, directly taking part in various anti-epidemic efforts, and actively supporting the work of other government departments in the concerted fight against the virus. The anti-epidemic work carried out by the Police includes:

(a) maintaining law and order at all entrances and exits of the designated quarantine centres, restricting in-and-out people flow and preventing people from fleeing the quarantine centres;

(b) manning border control points (BCPs) to assist in the execution of quarantine orders and to ensure the smooth operation of the BCPs;

(c) conducting spot checks on persons under mandatory home quarantine. Where a person escapes or refuses to follow the instructions of DH personnel and poses threats to community health, the Police will intervene by taking law enforcement actions;

(d) assisting the DH in the execution of quarantine orders which include evacuating residents and sending them to quarantine centres when necessary; and

(e) participating in the law enforcement actions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap 599G), following up on reports made by members of the public and inspecting various designated premises.

Separately, the Police have set up a 200-strength "Police Anti-coronavirus Contingent" comprising serving and retired police volunteers to support the Government's anti-epidemic measures.

In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Food and Health Bureau, my reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) Since the epidemic outbreak, the Police have received masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) from the Government Logistics Department (GLD) according to the Government's principles of distributing protective gears and having regard to actual needs. The Police also procure masks from the market and distributes them to its personnel for use. The Police review the consumption and stock of masks every week before applying to the GLD for further supply. The Police will continue to review its operational needs carefully, and supplement the provision of PPE from the GLD as appropriate. The Police will strictly comply with the Government's existing standards for PPE distribution, and provide PPE to its personnel in accordance with the "use where necessary" principle.

Given the sharp increase in global demand for anti-epidemic items, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government faces keen competition in its procurement. To avoid undermining the bargaining power of GLD and other departments in the procurement of anti-epidemic items, the HKSAR Government considers it inappropriate at this stage to disclose specific information about the quantity of anti-epidemic items used by individual departments and their stock level.

(2) The Police attach great importance to the operational efficacy of

officers on duty and the associated risks they may encounter, and has been taking corresponding measures to provide them with the most suitable protective equipment. The Police will take into account the guidelines and recommendations made by the Centre for Health Protection of the DH and equip frontline officers with suitable PPE to ensure that they can perform duties safely and effectively, having regard to officers' operational needs, their work nature and the risk of infection.

Meanwhile, the Police have a set of guidelines for handling infectious diseases, which cover a host of formation-based and personal protective measures, as well as the correct procedures for using PPE.

(3) With the development of the epidemic, government departments' demand for protective items has significantly increased. Having taken into account recommendations from experts and the stock level, the Government has set priorities for the use of protective items. At present, for protective items procured by the Government, priority will be accorded to meeting the needs of frontline staff involved in quarantine work (including healthcare staff and port health staff of the DH and frontline staff implementing quarantine orders) and the maintenance of essential public services.

As the epidemic progresses, since January this year, the Hospital Authority (HA) has expedited the procurement procedures for protective equipment, and increased the stockpiling target from three months to six months. With the Government's coordination, some of the protective equipment ordered earlier by the HA has arrived gradually. With the exception of N95 respirators, the current supply of various protective equipment is more stable than that at the initial stage of the epidemic. Based on the average consumption, the stock of various protective equipment is estimated to last for over two months. The HA will continue to expedite procurement procedures to ensure that frontline healthcare staff have enough protective equipment when providing services.