

## LCQ6: Quarantine requirement for persons arriving at Hong Kong from the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 13):

Question:

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic is still rampant across the globe at present. On the 28th of last month, the Government announced its plan to relax the requirement of the 14-day compulsory quarantine for persons arriving at Hong Kong from the Mainland on the grounds that the epidemic on the Mainland has been brought under control. However, quite a number of members of the public suspect whether the Mainland authorities have disseminated comprehensive data on the epidemic. As such, they query that it is premature for the Government to relax the relevant requirement. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has grasped (i) the number of asymptomatic infection cases of COVID-19 in the statistics compiled and (ii) the number of tests for COVID-19 conducted, by the Mainland authorities from January 1 to April 15 this year; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will review the aforesaid plan to relax the quarantine requirement; and

(2) whether it will consider sending experts to the Mainland again to gain an understanding of the situation of the epidemic there, including the numbers of confirmed cases, asymptomatic infection cases, suspected infection cases and tests for COVID-19 conducted; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen is as follows:

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB), the then-Ministry of Health of the Central People's Government and the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture (SSAC) of the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region signed the Co-operation Agreement on Response Mechanism for Public Health Emergencies (the Agreement) in 2005. The Agreement was updated with the National Health Commission (NHC) and SSAC in 2018. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has maintained close liaison with the NHC according to the mechanism under the Agreement to notify one

another of surveillance data on infectious diseases, emergency public health incidents and responses to major infectious diseases, etc., with a view to strengthening joint efforts in disease prevention and control.

With regards to the outbreak of coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19), the CHP received notifications from the NHC respectively on December 31, 2019 and January 3 and 5, 2020 that a number of viral pneumonia cases with unknown cause had been identified through disease surveillance by health authorities in Wuhan since December 2019. Also, in mid-January 2020, at the invitation of the NHC and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, the FHB sent a delegation to Wuhan to learn more about the outbreak. The NHC has been notifying the CHP of the latest information on the outbreak in a timely manner since December 31, 2019 according to the mechanism under the Agreement.

The Mainland has been reporting the number of asymptomatic infected cases detected through enhanced surveillance since March 31, 2020. As at May 10, the Mainland had reported 1 747 asymptomatic infected cases, with an average of 43 cases per day. Among them, 356 cases (20 per cent) were imported cases, 261 cases subsequently displayed symptoms. Guangdong Province reported 279 asymptomatic infected cases during the abovementioned period, with an average of 6.8 cases per day. Among them, 105 cases (38 per cent) were imported cases.

All along, we have been paying heed to science and expert advice and adopting a "suppress and lift" strategy to put in place necessary prevention and control measures after careful consideration of factors such as public health, the economic situation and acceptance level of the general public, etc. The Government conducts detailed risk assessments prior to implementing border control and compulsory quarantine measures in response to the disease outbreak in other countries or regions, and will review and consider rationalising the relevant measures in view of the development of the outbreak. We will continue to maintain close liaison and co-operation with the health authorities in the Mainland and other countries and regions as well as relevant international organisations on handling and controlling the outbreak together, in order to safeguard the health of the Hong Kong people and the robustness of Hong Kong's healthcare system.