

LCQ8: Hong Kong residents stranded on the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon James To, and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, in the Legislative Council today (March 18):

Question:

To curb the spread of the novel coronavirus epidemic, a number of Mainland provinces, cities, counties, towns and villages have implemented closed management one after another since early January this year, under which the entry and exit of persons and vehicles are subject to stringent restrictions. It is learnt that thousands of Hong Kong residents are currently stranded on the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the current number of Mainland-stranded Hong Kong residents, with a breakdown by (i) their whereabouts and (ii) the age group to which they belong (i.e. aged below 18, 18 to 60, and above 60); among such persons, the respective numbers of pregnant women and infants aged below one;
- (2) of the respective to-date numbers of Mainland-stranded Hong Kong residents who have (i) requested the SAR Government to deliver medicaments to them from Hong Kong and (ii) obtained such medicaments, with a breakdown by their whereabouts; if it has received requests for the delivery of medicaments from Hong Kong residents stranded in places outside Hubei Province on the Mainland, whether it has made the arrangements; if not, whether it can make the arrangements expeditiously; whether it has, by drawing reference from the practices adopted by overseas postal administrations, arranged the use of unmanned aircraft systems to deliver medicaments to Hong Kong residents who are located at places with inconvenient transport links or those who cannot go out conveniently;
- (3) of the to-date number of Mainland-stranded Hong Kong residents confirmed to have been infected with the novel coronavirus, together with a breakdown by the gender and age group (covering 10 years each) to which they belong; among such persons, the number of those who have been admitted to hospitals for medical treatment, together with a breakdown by their whereabouts; and
- (4) whether the offices of the SAR Government on the Mainland have liaised with the Mainland authorities to discuss how arrangements can be made to assist Mainland-stranded Hong Kong residents in returning to Hong Kong (e.g. conducting novel coronavirus testing on them in batches, and making transport arrangements to take persons confirmed uninfected back to Hong Kong); if so, of the details of the relevant preparatory work (including the arrangements for the quarantine and isolation of such residents after their return to Hong Kong) and the progress made so far?

Reply:

President,

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

(1) As at the morning of March 16, more than 3 400 Hong Kong residents who had requested for assistance from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government were stranded in various places in Hubei Province. They belong to different age groups, and there are six pregnant women among them.

The SAR Government is greatly concerned about the situation of the Hong Kong residents there. The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Wuhan (Wuhan ETO), the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Offices in the province and different municipalities as well as other non-governmental organisations will continue to provide practical assistance on all fronts to the Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei Province.

(2) Some of the Hong Kong people in Hubei Province, especially those with chronic illnesses, require medications provided in Hong Kong. Since public transport service in Hubei Province has yet to resume normal, arrangements have been made by the HKSAR Government to deliver medications to the Hong Kong people in Hubei Province who are in need. As at the morning of March 16, arrangements were made to deliver medications to 233 Hong Kong people in Hubei Province.

In addition, given the compulsory quarantine measures in Hong Kong, an increasing number of Hong Kong people in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces are unable to make day trips to Hong Kong to attend follow-up consultations to replenish their medications and return to the Mainland on the same day as they did so previously. Although their family members may collect the prescription medications for them from clinics, they cannot deliver the medications to the Mainland using ordinary mail services. To address their concerns, the HKSAR Government has introduced a special scheme for delivering prescription medications. Priority is given to those currently located in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces who will run out of prescription medications by end March. As at the morning of March 16, arrangements were made to deliver medications to more than 1 800 Hong Kong people in need.

(3) According to available information, as at the morning of March 16, 20 Hong Kong people belonging to different age groups in the Mainland were confirmed to have been infected with COVID-19, amongst which 14 were in Hubei Province, four in Guangdong Province, one in Fujian Province and one in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Three of them are being treated in hospitals in Hubei Province, one of them is being treated in a hospital in Guangdong Province and 15 of them have been discharged. Among those who are hospitalised, all are stable except one who is in serious condition. Moreover, a 77-year-old man from Hong Kong who usually resided in Wuhan was infected with COVID-19 and passed away after his treatment failed. The Wuhan ETO, upon being informed of the case, immediately contacted his family in Guangzhou to offer assistance.

(4) On March 4 and 5, the HKSAR Government sent the first batch of four chartered flights to take Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei Province back to Hong Kong. The first batch of chartered flights mainly assisted Hong Kong residents stranded in Wuhan to return to Hong Kong. For those in areas outside Wuhan, priority was accorded to relatively urgent cases, including pregnant women, those who suffered from serious illnesses or were urgently in need of medical treatments in Hong Kong, and secondary school graduates who needed to sit for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. The HKSAR Government brought back a total of 469 Hong Kong residents from Hubei Province during this operation, including 379 Hong Kong residents in Wuhan and 90 Hong Kong residents and accompanying persons in other parts of Hubei Province who had an urgent need to return to Hong Kong. Those with an urgent need to return to Hong Kong included 14 pregnant women, 21 who suffered from serious illnesses or were urgently in need of medical treatments in Hong Kong, and nine secondary school graduates who needed to sit for the HKDSE Examination.

When arranging for the return of Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei Province, the HKSAR Government took a series of measures to minimise public health risks and the risk of cross-infection. Staff of the Department of Health had conducted a health assessment beforehand for each and every person bound to take the chartered flights to Hong Kong to check whether they had any symptoms such as fever. The Hubei Provincial Government had also conducted verification to ascertain that all those who were allowed to board the flight were not confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19, and were not close contacts of confirmed patients. Before boarding, passengers had undergone four temperature checks to ensure that they were not having fever, or developing abnormal vital signs, respiratory tract symptoms or other signs of infectious diseases, and they were required to put on protective gears. Upon disembarkation from the plane, medical staff from the Department of Health briefed the returnees about the quarantine arrangements and checked their body temperature. They were then taken to the quarantine centre in Chun Yeung Estate by coaches to undergo 14 days of quarantine observation. They also took a laboratory test to ascertain whether they were infected with COVID-19.

On March 16, the HKSAR Government announced that it would arrange the second batch of chartered flights to take Hong Kong residents stranded in Xiaogan, Xianning, Huangshi and Wuhan in Hubei Province back to Hong Kong. For Hong Kong residents in Hubei Province with relatively urgent needs, such as pregnant women, those who suffer from serious illnesses or are urgently in need of medical treatments in Hong Kong, or secondary school graduates who need to sit for the HKDSE Examination, the HKSAR Government has already arranged them to take the first batch of chartered flights to return to Hong Kong as far as possible. For Hong Kong residents with urgent needs who are still in Hubei Province, the HKSAR Government will discuss the matter with the Hubei Provincial Government and relevant local departments, and seek medical advice on whether they are fit for travel, with the aim of taking them back to Hong Kong on the second batch of chartered flights as far as practicable.

As for Hong Kong residents who are now in areas other than Xiaogan, Xianning, Huangshi and Wuhan with no urgent needs, the HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close liaison with the Hubei Provincial Government and make arrangements for them by batches according to priorities.