

Suspension of face-to-face classes of primary schools, kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres until Chinese New Year

The Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (January 11) that all primary schools, kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres in Hong Kong (including schools offering non-local curriculum) should suspend face-to-face classes and all on-campus activities (including the cancellation or postponement of examinations and other activities within school premises) on or before Friday (January 14) until schools' Chinese New Year holidays. Private schools offering non-formal curriculum (commonly known as "tutorial schools") should suspend face-to-face classes of related class levels until February 7. The current arrangements for face-to-face classes for secondary schools will continue.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "The COVID-19 Omicron variant has high infectivity and is posing a serious threat. Currently, there is still an invisible chain of transmission within the community, and there have been confirmed cases of young children infected by family members in these few days. Teachers and peers who have had close contact with the infected children have to be put under quarantine. There have also been outbreaks of upper respiratory tract infection in kindergartens and primary schools in recent months, with symptoms similar to those of COVID-19. Kindergarten and primary school students are young and their self-care capability is relatively lower. In addition, most of them are not yet eligible for vaccination because of the age restriction. We care about students' learning and healthy development, and are at the same time concerned that they have a higher risk of infection.

"During the period of face-to-face class suspension, schools should remain open to look after students who do not have carers to take care of them at home. Schools will arrange for staff to be on duty to handle school affairs and answer parents' enquiries.

"In addition, schools will flexibly deploy various learning modes to sustain students' learning at home. As children should avoid prolonged use of digital screen devices, kindergartens should deploy other modes and encourage children to read at home, design learning activities that suit children's abilities and interests, and provide parents with guidance and learning materials as needed to help children maintain their curiosity and motivation to learn."

The spokesman continued, "Schools should remind parents to follow anti-epidemic precautionary measures and pay close attention to the health conditions of their children. Parents should avoid taking their children to crowded places with poor ventilation. Students should also maintain a

balanced diet, exercise regularly and take adequate rest in order to strengthen their immunity. During the period of face-to-face class suspension, schools should continue to maintain communication with parents and students to show care for the learning and emotional needs of the students. Schools should also keep the school campuses clean and hygienic all the time. Schools are required to continue to strictly observe the health measures as stipulated in the 'Health Protection Measures for Schools' issued by the EDB and the 'Health Advice to Schools for the Prevention of COVID-19' issued by the Centre for Health Protection."

The spokesman added, "The EDB will issue a letter to schools with details later today. We are confident that schools will continue to remain flexible and support students to learn at home through various modes of learning and teaching. Suspension of face-to-face classes is a difficult decision. We hope that we can effectively control the epidemic with decisive measures at this critical moment, and that students can return to school with peace of mind as soon as possible."

The spokesman urged unvaccinated teachers and school staff, parents and students to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and their family members, and to construct a more effective protective barrier for both schools and the community.

The epidemic situation may evolve rapidly in the future. The EDB will closely monitor the situation and move in step with the development of the overall anti-epidemic measures in Hong Kong, and endeavour to inform schools of the corresponding arrangements as early as possible.

In addition, regarding a report today alleging "after dispelling rumours yesterday but announcing class suspension today, parents agree but are puzzled", the spokesman pointed out that the bureau noted a rumour on suspension of all classes last Saturday (January 8) and issued a press release on the same day to clarify and stop the rumour so that parents would not be misled. As a matter of fact, since last week, the Omicron variant has been spreading fast in Hong Kong and the situation has been evolving rapidly. After thorough consideration, the Government acted decisively and in a timely manner announced today that kindergartens and primary schools will suspend face-to-face classes while secondary schools will maintain the current class arrangements. The spokesperson reminded members of the public to refer to the EDB's official announcements and not to be misled by rumours.