

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (March 31):

Reporter: Mrs Lam, hospitals are now running out of isolation beds and there are even patients saying that they have to wait for days to get admitted to hospital. So what are you going to do about this? And secondly, given that there are now so few cases on the Mainland, is it still necessary for Hong Kong to require people coming from the Mainland to self-isolate? Do you have any plans to re-open some of the border checkpoints anytime soon?

Chief Executive: First of all, as I have admitted just now, it is not satisfactory for confirmed cases not to be admitted into hospital yet. This phenomenon appears because we have a large number of arrivals from overseas who have been put on home quarantine, which means that upon arrival, they have no symptoms, so they have been put on home quarantine. But in order to play safe, we require each of them to go through a saliva test. As and when the saliva test is confirmed positive, then this patient becomes a confirmed case, but he or she is still staying at home. There needs to be a process to arrange this confirmed positive patient to be admitted into hospital and the problem now lies in that capacity constraint in the hospital to admit patients in a more speedy manner. I have asked the Secretary for Food and Health to work very closely with the Hospital Authority to speed up the process as much as possible. I suspect the addition of the 400 second-tier isolation beds very soon in Hospital Authority will help to provide more capacity to handle the situation.

As far as the situation in the Mainland, you are absolutely right. The cases in the Mainland have dropped to a very, very low level and actually I suppose the great, great majority of these confirmed cases in the Mainland recently are imported cases. Logically, especially given our constraints in managing the home quarantine cases and so on, there may be some justifications for relaxing some of the control requirements, but my reply is 'no'. For the time being, we have no plans to loosen any of the controls being put on arrivals from the Mainland. One is the situation is very fluid. It may still change. Secondly, after all these control measures, closure of border control points, imposition of the 14-day quarantine, not only with the Mainland but also now with Macao, we are seeing a significant drop in the number of arrivals, whether they are Hong Kong residents or non-Hong Kong residents, coming in from the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge as well as the Shenzhen Bay Control Point, so there isn't a huge need for relaxing the border control points. And thirdly, the regulation applicable to Mainland arrivals, which is regulation Cap.599C, will expire. You remember all these

regulations are time limited. This particular one will expire in early May. So even if we do nothing, by early May, this regulation will lose its effectiveness and then we will be able to resume some of the traffic flow without this 14-day quarantine requirement.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)