

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 (August 25):

Reporter: A few English questions. First, regarding the city-wide testing, why does the Government consider the risk associated with gathering for this city-wide test to be something manageable but think holding a LegCo election at around the same time would be too risky and decided to delay the polls? Second question, some doctors and some well-known people in the society have expressed this reluctance to join this city-wide testing, basically saying that, the test is going to only last for several days and people may get infected again, it's not really useful. So you dismiss these criticisms as purely a smear tactic for the Central Government. Can you explain why that is the case and not concerned with other factors? Third question regarding the SJ's (Secretary for Justice) interventions into two private prosecutions, what do you have to say to critics who said that this is a political decision aiming to protect the Police and government supporters, and without giving the courts a chance to make a judgement over these cases? Would that harm the public confidence in Hong Kong's legal system and the fact that justice can be served under this system? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Three questions. First of all, the purpose of launching the Universal Community Testing is to identify as early as possible any silent transmitters in society so that we will feel safer to consider the next stage of social distancing measures with a view that Hong Kong's economy and people's livelihood could resume normal as soon as possible, and testing has always been a useful instrument locally and globally. I'm sure you can find many pictures and reports about different places doing extensive testing as a means to combat this pandemic. I don't think I need to go further to explain the objectives of the testing.

Your question seems to focus on the differences or the situation comparing this Universal Community Testing with the carrying out of a LegCo election. I think there are a lot of differences between the two arrangements. As far as the Universal Community Testing is concerned, we are not cramming it into a single day. We have allowed ourselves up to two weeks to invite members of the community to come forward for the testing. Secondly, we are going to do an online booking system, preferably we will not be seeing crowds or long queues in front of the swabbing stations to have the test done. I really think it's inappropriate or just unreasonable to try to compare the LegCo election to the Universal Community Testing.

The second point is why do some people, especially as you describe

“well-known people” and well-known people in the professional fields, have expressed reluctance to join the Programme or even to sort of ask people not to come forward. I just don’t know why. The testing is globally accepted as a good means to identify early the confirmed cases so that they could be isolated for treatment. And this testing capacity is not taking away from the testing capacity for the other higher priority areas. One is the clinical testing and medical surveillance testing undertaken by the Hospital Authority and the Department of Health. Secondly is the target group testing conducted by various departments. The laboratory capacity for these two other more important areas of testing requirements has been preserved. I am not diverting that capacity to this, or lest people will say that you should go back to the more high-priority areas. They are entirely different capacities. The reason why Hong Kong at this moment has a capacity to undertake such a large-scale Universal Community Testing is because of the assistance rendered by the Central People’s Government. They are sending us this sort of makeshift laboratories, they are sending us technicians to work in these laboratories to handle a large volume of specimens that need to be tested during that very short period. As far as the effectiveness or the efficacy of the testing, this is not something new, we all know by now that the COVID-19 test is only valid for a few days or up to two weeks, maybe. This is a fact. It’s not something innovative in our situation. But having a test is still useful as I have demonstrated with the figures on the number of confirmed cases that we managed to discover through various testing programmes.

Since you mentioned well-known people, I may as well make a remark. Well-known people in society carry a responsibility because they are well known, just like the Chief Executive. I carry a very heavy responsibility in whatever I said because people will, I hope, still attach weight to what the Chief Executive is saying because I’m in possession of more information, I will have more experts around me and colleagues analysing the situation for me. I would make a strong plea that well-known people, especially in the relevant professional areas, should really express their views in a more responsible way. Since this is about public health, let’s focus on public health.

I cannot really go into detail about your third question because prosecution matters or any legal matters under the Department of Justice are the purview of the Secretary for Justice. But to sort of allege that the Secretary for Justice is doing political intervention is totally unfair and inappropriate because by so doing you are also casting doubt and disrespect on Hong Kong’s judiciary system.

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