

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (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 (May 3):

Reporter: Good morning, Mrs Lam. First question relating to the anti-epidemic measures, has the Government considered relaxing the requirement for vaccinated students to test less frequently? Is that something on the table that the Government is considering? If so, when is there a timeline to do so? If not, what is the consideration of not doing that because a lot of parents are worried that, you know, it's going to cost a lot of money to buy RAT (rapid antigen test) kits. And the next question is today is (World) Press Freedom Day, I think Mr John Lee said Hong Kong already had press freedom, just like people have their identity cards. Do you agree with such a phrasing? And how do you convince the rest of the world that Hong Kong still has press freedom when there have been anecdotal accounts that former journalists have to work, for instance, as cashiers or even move overseas following the closure of Apple Daily, Stand News and Citizen News, and what has the Government been doing to promote press freedom? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First, on the question about the requirement that students going to school have to undertake a daily rapid antigen test, I said at the time of announcing this measure that this was not intended to be a permanent one, but it is not the time yet to review the relevance of this measure because it is still proven to be very reassuring for their schools and also for their parents. You will remember that since April 19, we have only allowed primary schools to resume their face-to-face learning, because secondary school premises were used for the DSE (Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education) examinations. From today onwards, this will be the first time that secondary school students are also going back to school for their face-to-face learning. So likewise, they will have to do their daily rapid antigen tests before entering the school premises; equally, it is a very reassuring measure for the schools and also for the parents. But in due course, we will, of course, revisit this measure.

You mentioned the parents' concern especially in buying the RAT kits. We have pledged that we will provide enough rapid antigen test kits for the schools to distribute free of charge to students who are needy, and we have defined what is a needy student in a very broad manner. So all the students from families receiving social security and students who are receiving the full grant or the half grant of student assistance will all be given – free of charge – the RAT kits. On top of that, I understand many school sponsoring bodies and other charity groups are also sending a lot of RAT kits to schools. I went to one of these schools last week and I met a few parents and they all felt that this was a very good move because now they could be assured that they were not infected and their kids could go to school safely.

So, we will continue this practice for a while and then come back to you on when it is the time to lift this requirement.

Hong Kong's press freedom, like other individual rights and freedoms, is enshrined in the Basic Law. In the 25 years since reunification, press freedom has been guaranteed in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). Our press scene, our media organisations, are as vibrant as ever. If you look at the number of such institutions registered with the Information Services Department for gaining entry to press conferences like this and also to receive news from the HKSAR Government, the number has not dropped. If you look at the presence of international and regional media, their presence has not subsided at all. This is by itself a very good indication of the vibrancy of press freedom in Hong Kong. But as I said on many occasions, particularly with the enactment of the National Security Law, journalists, media organisations, are not above the law. They also have to comply with the laws of Hong Kong, including the National Security Law. And if they have breached the law, then of course, the law enforcement bodies will have to take the necessary action.

Thank you.

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