

## Transcript of remarks by CE at media session (with photo/video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session this afternoon (January 6):

Reporter: The first is, apart from the government officials we also know some lawmakers attended this party. Do we now know which lawmakers also attended it, and did some of them meet with the Director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, Mr Xia Baolong, at a meeting yesterday? The second is, will this incident affect the operation of the Government as the officials came into contact with suspected COVID case and have to be quarantined? Does the Government have some protocol in place to make sure the Government's operation will not be affected under such circumstances? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The first question, I don't know, because normally when there is a confirmed case that needs contact tracing, the work is carried out by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP). We would know more from the Centre for Health Protection's contact tracing and other investigations. The reason why I can stand here to tell you a bit of details about this particular case is because I was prompted this morning that one of my Principal Officials, the Secretary for Home Affairs, attended that occasion and was likely to be a close contact of the confirmed case, and since I gathered from him and other sources that there could be other officials who had attended the occasion. From morning till now, through the Director of the Chief Executive's Office, we have done our internal investigation to identify as many as possible those colleagues who had attended the occasion and hence I could share with you this list of 10 officials altogether. I don't know about the LegCo (Legislative Council) Members except reading from the online news that perhaps a few had also been to that occasion. And the necessary action to be taken by the Members themselves, upon the advice of the CHP and also by the LegCo commission in terms of cleansing and so on, are for the Legislative Council to decide. And about these close contacts of a confirmed case, where are they, how will they be affected, you have to leave it to the Centre for Health Protection, but generally my understanding is that for a confirmed case's close contact, the next layer of close contact will be those who are living in the same household. We will not go that far to involve a third party who has just had an encounter with a close contact of the confirmed case.

Of course the quarantine of important or senior officials would have some impact on the operation of the Government, but as far as I could now share with you, there is only one Principal Official, that is the Secretary for Home Affairs, who has to be quarantined in Penny's Bay for a certain period. I'm sure that in the Home Affairs Bureau we have the Permanent Secretary, we have other people who could look after the work of the Home Affairs Bureau during his absence.

Reporter: Mrs Lam, can you explain why you said you are disappointed in your officials? As you said the Cathay Pacific management people have to be responsible, do you think you also have to be responsible in this regard and in this case? And secondly, do you think that the Government has to reconsider the work from home arrangement for civil servants, being that there is a possibility of a cluster emerging from this birthday party? Thank you.

Chief Executive: On the point about responsibility or accountability, as the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, I have the first accountability to the people of Hong Kong in fighting this COVID-19 pandemic. That is why the media have been seeing me very often. I never delegate the responsibility to account for the Government's actions in combatting COVID-19, including this incident. I have accepted my responsibility to that extent. But Principal Officials and other senior officials of the SAR Government have to perform their respective duties in observing the rules promulgated by the Food and Health Bureau and also have to watch out their own behaviour. They should not engage in activities which will carry risks, and as a result it would create more work for the CHP and also make things a bit complicated for their own bureau and department.

It is very strange for you to ask me why I was disappointed, because we have been dealing with this Omicron in the community a few days before January 3. That occasion took place in the evening of January 3, and prior to that, I had been warning people, and the Secretary for Food and Health had been warning people that we are now under significant risk of the spread of Omicron into the community. And very specifically, the Secretary for Food and Health held a press conference on New Year's Eve, December 31, after a meeting I chaired. She came out to explain the situation that we were in, and she said that she wanted to give four pieces of advice to the people of Hong Kong. One of the pieces of advice is to avoid mass gatherings, and also to avoid taking off your mask and avoid taking photos without mask on when you were on such an occasion. My colleagues, apparently, have not taken the advice of the Secretary for Food and Health, how could they set a good example for the people of Hong Kong? But I would advise that in looking at these colleagues, maybe a distinction should be drawn between the one who spent the whole night on the occasion and hence put himself in a highly risky situation that requires him to be quarantined, and others who just dropped by to say hello or to congratulate the host and then left. A distinction has to be drawn clearly in terms of whether they are sufficiently alert or responsible for their own behaviour.

On the work from home, I have actually explained yesterday. We have several rounds of work from home in previous waves of the COVID-19 epidemic. We realised that, especially now, we have so many duties to perform in the compulsory test, the restriction-testing declaration every night, and the vaccination and so on. Allowing some of the civil servants to work from home may not be the best or the optimal arrangement for the people of Hong Kong because they have to provide service. But we have other means to reduce the people flow. They are coming in in staggered hours, they are going out for

lunch in staggered hours, and if they have counter service, they perhaps should find other means to prevent face-to-face contact. For those really could work online, heads of departments are advised that they could be allowed to work online if there is no detriment to the service that we are providing to the people of Hong Kong. That doesn't mean that we are ignoring the need for caution. We are doing it in a very cautious way because we have two years of experience. We know that now is a time to reduce people flow and we have ways and means to reduce the flow of people as far as the civil service is concerned and as far as the overall community is concerned.

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

