

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 (February 4):

Reporter: Good afternoon, Mrs Lam. Will the "vaccine pass" be applied to children? What will be the age range for the "vaccine pass"? Is it appropriate to make children as young as five to get two shots or even a booster in order to enter premises? And when will the Government require the public to get the booster? Also, is it still practical to continue the containment policy given the strain on manpower and facilities and the impact on schools, students and businesses? And at what threshold do you think Hong Kong will be able to implement the "live with the virus" policy? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I'm sorry I actually still could not fully hear what you are saying. That's the problem of wearing a mask sometimes. I'll try to answer. First of all, the "vaccine pass" is imposed in order to encourage and induce vaccination by those who should be vaccinated, especially the elderly, because the current vaccination rate amongst the elderly is still very low. For example, for those aged 70 and above, I think half of them have yet to be vaccinated, and the number is probably about half a million. We really need to encourage, promote and induce more unvaccinated people to come forward to get the jab.

If children are not eligible for vaccination for the time being, of course they will not be subject to the "vaccine pass" because in Hong Kong's case, vaccination for children started very late, and at the moment we still have not been providing one of the vaccines, that is the BioNTech, to young kids aged five and above. I would imagine that when we amend the legislation to provide "vaccine pass" in terms of children, we will make the needed allowance. We wouldn't put children under a very difficult situation.

As to when to get the booster, this is not for me to say because it's clinically driven. We have a joint scientific group on the vaccines in the Department of Health. They would advise the Government for each type of vaccine – that is the Sinovac and the BioNTech – what should be the lead time between the first and second doses and between the second and third. When I said that after a certain period the "vaccine pass" will be defined as having completed three doses, again we will make full allowance. The period would not be shorter than the period advised by the experts, otherwise it's illogical and unreasonable. For example, if the experts said that the third dose should only be taken nine months after the second dose, then to define "vaccine pass" as having completed three doses we will have to take into account that period. You need not worry about that.

For the containment policy, at the moment it is still the best policy and strategy for Hong Kong. It has proven to be effective in helping Hong

Kong to suppress the previous waves and allow people to get back to their normal work until we are more fully vaccinated, then we can consider, maybe, another arrangement; but at the moment, as I said on many, many occasions, this is still the best policy. Achieving "dynamic zero" is still our best target until we have reached a more satisfactory vaccination rate. We will continue to do this policy but we are strengthening all the measures. We are enhancing our capacity so that in containing the spread of virus, we could be more effective. That's what we are doing.

I hope you will agree with me that we should put the lives of our people at the top priority. We have managed to keep the number of fatalities very low – at 213 for a period of over two years, and we wouldn't want to put Hong Kong people at risk.

Thank you.

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

