

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

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination today (February 22):

Chief Executive: Let me say a few words in English. I am extremely pleased that I and my Principal Officials have come to this Community Vaccination Centre to receive the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. We are taking the Sinovac vaccine today, which was developed and manufactured in the Mainland, because this is the first vaccine that has arrived in Hong Kong last Friday, with a total of 1 million doses. This act of us kick-starts a very important vaccination programme in Hong Kong. We are very determined, very committed to rolling out a free and universal vaccination programme for the people of Hong Kong so that we could get ourselves out of this epidemic as soon as possible. I would appeal to all residents in Hong Kong: when your turn comes, please register on the Internet and come forward to receive your jab as soon as possible. We have enough vaccines procured. We will do all we could to make it easier for residents to receive the vaccination. But at the end of the day, this job, like all the other efforts that we have made in the past year, requires the full collaboration of the people of Hong Kong. Protect yourself, protect your family and your loved ones and help Hong Kong society to recover as soon as possible, please come forward to receive the vaccination.

Reporter: Regarding the public statement from Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, only true patriots will be allowed to take up positions of authority in the executive, legislative and judicial branches. Can you clarify what exactly is a "true patriot"? Is a person who supports democracy for Hong Kong considered as unpatriotic? And also will pro-democracy figures basically be barred from running in future elections? And also do you still stand by your earlier comments that the Chief Executive should better be selected by elections rather than by consultation?

Chief Executive: First of all, I don't think the adjective "true" has been used by the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office Director. In my view, you could only be patriotic or not patriotic. I don't think you can have a false patriot who could pretend to be a patriot. What Director Xia has said and which I agree is that it should not be very difficult to distinguish someone who is patriotic from someone who is not. He has outlined in detail those situations which you would not regard a person like that as patriotic. For example a person who did not support "One Country, Two Systems", a person who feels that Hong Kong could be independent, a person who prefers to collude with another overseas authority to subvert the power of the Central Government and the Hong Kong SAR Government. These persons with these sort of acts and actions could not be described as patriotic. What Director Xia has elaborated is, when everybody has to be patriotic to join the political structure, if that particular person is in a very important position, then he

or she should be even more patriotic, in Chinese is 愛國愛家, 愛國愛家... You have to be a very firm and decisive patriot to the extent that you would be prepared to put in your every effort to defend "One Country, Two Systems" regardless of your personal sacrifices. I think that is the distinction that he has made. It's not between a true and false patriot.

This need to change the electoral system and arrangements in Hong Kong is for one single purpose, that is to make sure that whoever is governing Hong Kong is patriotic and those who govern Hong Kong are not confined to the Chief Executive or her political team. It applies to various aspects in the political structure, that is, the executive, the legislative, the judiciary, the District Councils and the civil service. It is not about obstructing the development of the pro-democracy party in Hong Kong, as long as whoever has that political inclination, it's not someone who is unpatriotic, who will do the things that I have just described to you based on what I heard this morning from Director Xia's speech.

Article 45 of the Basic Law allows for the selection of the Chief Executive by consultation or by election. Given what we have already done in the past 23 years and these current circumstances, I still feel that choosing a Chief Executive by election is my personal preference.

Reporter: About vaccines. Professor Ben Cowling, the Hong Kong University public health expert has said that, if we use the Sinovac vaccine, which only has barely 50 per cent efficacy rate, he said that it's not the best option to achieve high level of herd immunity. Do you think that the Government will have this misleading footing to believe that it's actually safe, and also make the public to believe that it's actually safe after getting the vaccine, and after you relax those social distancing measures and in turn put the whole Hong Kong population at bigger risk? And why are there only five centres with the Sinovac vaccines? Do you think that not a lot of people will try to get the Sinovac jabs?

Chief Executive: I have to spend some time to reply to your questions because your questions are quite loaded, or being quite critical about a particular vaccine, that is Sinovac, which is manufactured and developed in the Mainland of China. First, let me describe again, every vaccine authorised by the Secretary for Food and Health for emergency use in Hong Kong is based on a very stringent and robust system governed by law. It is nothing that is just administrative in nature, it is governed by law. There is a legal framework. Within that legal framework, that vaccine has to be recommended by an expert panel of advisors. And if you go through the list of 12 experts, they are really experts in their respective fields. For the Sinovac vaccine, the expert advisory panel has conducted two lengthy meetings, read hundreds of pages of data and documents, and also looked at the efficacy of the vaccine in other places before they made a recommendation that the Secretary for Food and Health could authorise this vaccine for use. As one of the experts put it, it is too simplistic to try to compare the vaccine's percentage one against the other. There are many factors involved. I will not be drawn into that particular percentage, but I need to assure everyone, especially we are on the first day of kick-starting this vaccination programme, that the

Government is very serious about the safety, efficacy and quality of vaccines. We would only use vaccines which meet those high standards before we put it into the Government vaccination programme.

You asked about social distancing. Up till now, we have not done anything about social distancing relaxation which has anything to do with vaccination. And I do not envisage that within a very short span of time, we will relax social distancing on the basis of vaccination because it would take a pretty lengthy time before the vaccination will have their desired effects in protecting individuals from being infected, in creating a certain degree of herd immunity in society. If the cases do come down steadily, especially the unlinked local cases, then we may have more basis to relax the measures, but it has nothing to do with vaccination. Your accusation that we are using vaccination to relax and hence creating more risk is simply not true.

The third is a factual question. The reason why we have put Sinovac in five of the 29 Community Vaccination Centres is because of the nature and the characteristics of the vaccines. Fosun/BioNTech is very demanding in terms of temperature control, in terms of dilution, so it has to be used in a very sophisticated environment where we have all these medical and nursing staff, have sufficient space for people to rest and also we will have contingency if things go wrong. But the Sinovac vaccine is a normal vaccine that could be put in the refrigerator, so we are extensively using the Sinovac vaccine in private clinics where you have only a doctor and a nurse. They can easily administer the Sinovac vaccine in the same way that they are using the flu vaccine on behalf of the Hong Kong SAR Government. It is not favouring one vaccine over another. I would say that my colleagues, the Secretary for the Civil Service and the Secretary for Food and Health, have put in a lot of efforts to decide where to put these vaccines in order to achieve the best results. If you just count the number of vaccination places, the Sinovac vaccine will have even more outlets than the BioNTech vaccine because it's available in over 1 000 private doctors' clinics in Hong Kong.

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



