

Transcript of remarks by SCS and SFH at media session (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, on the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme at a media session this afternoon (March 15):

Reporter: Firstly, about the inoculation rate, you said around 200 000 people have got their first dose and currently there are three million people eligible, so that's around seven per cent. What do you make of this inoculation rate? If people are not so enthusiastic or even reluctant to get vaccinated, will letting more people become eligible help drive up the inoculation rate? And what are you doing to try to make people more accepted of the jabs? For example, will you consider doing more promotion or education or even providing incentive? Secondly, you said that there are 12 more vaccination centres opening tomorrow, so what is the maximum number of jabs that can be given each day? If all centres are running at the full capacity, what is the current utilisation rate? You said that the BioNTech jabs are difficult to store and if not used properly, they will be wasted. Any jabs being wasted at the moment?

Secretary for the Civil Service: Thank you very much. At present, close to 200 000 people got their first jabs. The most important thing is that we have the vaccination venues, we have the vaccines available and make the necessary arrangement for those who wish to be vaccinated can get the vaccine. By setting priority groups, of course, would let those who have higher priority could come forward first. But based on the experience in the past 18 days, we notice that there are still capacity to handle more and there are people who do not belong to the priority groups but who wish to be vaccinated early. The present expansion of the priority groups to include those aged 30 and above basically is to make more people who wish to be vaccinated can get the vaccine and also to streamline the administrative arrangements. By so doing people need not provide the proof of their occupations or companies or the sectors that they belong. They just show their ID card and make the online booking and then get the jabs. It will make the whole process smooth and more efficient. We will continue to monitor the progress. Our target is to encourage people to get vaccinated and our plan is to have most of the people get vaccinated by the end of this year. We are working towards that target. Twelve more centres administering BioNTech will be opened, in operation, tomorrow. We monitored the utilisation rate. In the past few days, we notice that for BioNTech vaccine, around 90 per cent or 92 per cent is the utilisation rate. That means that for those people who made the bookings, over 90 per cent came forward and got vaccinated. It doesn't mean that we would have a wastage of vaccine, particularly for the BioNTech, because the actual operation, I mean the colleagues in the centres closely monitor the number of people showing up and then they make the arrangement to do the dilution and withdrawals, particularly when it comes to close to 8pm, say

after 7pm. They would closely monitor the number of people showing up. And then they would do the dilution and withdrawals, in Chinese says "ââââââ", so that you can monitor the number of vaccine really required and then utilise the vials and get the dilution and withdrawals. By so doing, with this meticulous monitoring and planning, we can minimise the vaccine that cannot be used. We will continue to do that. As regards the capacity, as I mentioned, with the opening of the 12 centres tomorrow, by the end of this month, the two vaccines altogether, more than 300 000 quotas would be made available for people making the booking.

Secretary for Food and Health: Regarding gaining people's confidence in vaccines, I think it is very important for us to understand the benefits of vaccination, let alone the vaccines that we have authorised in Hong Kong now are safe, efficacious and also of the required quality. The benefit of vaccination as I have said earlier is that the more people get vaccinated and the faster they get vaccinated, the better they are protected, not only as an individual but also in the community as well as improving or helping the control of our epidemic situation. As we can see, after some relaxation of the social distancing measures, we have already observed some outbreaks. Certainly, we do not want to see all these different premises closing down and opening again. Therefore, with arrival of the vaccines, it is important for everybody to get vaccinated. It would be of the best interest, not only of the individuals, but also of all the sector to get vaccinated. It is because with vaccination, with more people getting vaccinated in Hong Kong, the faster we will be able to get herd immunity, and the faster we will be able to get our normal daily life and our economic situation back on track, let alone all the other incentives like travelling. I think it is important for everybody to embrace the opportunity that we have now in Hong Kong. We can have a choice for vaccination, and also we have enough vaccines for everybody to be vaccinated.

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