

Transcript of remarks by SFH and SCS (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, and the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, on the Universal Community Testing Programme at a media session this afternoon (September 9):

Reporter: Mr Nip, you just said the scheme is voluntary, but you also said that people have the duty to get tested. Do you think people may think that they are being pressured to do the test? You also called on the teachers, parents, students, bosses, workers to get tested. What if schools and employers make it mandatory? Can the workers or the schools ask employees or students to submit test results before schools restart or the businesses reopen? Can people reject this kind of request? Thank you.

Secretary for the Civil Service: We all know that the Universal Community Testing Programme is voluntary in nature. What I said at my opening remarks was to explain the objective of the programme. Also from the operational experience, the programme is effective to find out, to identify those infected in the community including the asymptomatic cases. It's helpful in containing the epidemic. So, if you look at it from the public health and also from controlling the epidemic angle, it's not just about yourself, but it's also about the community. We all want the community to overcome the current wave of epidemic, so that we could all return to our normal business and activities including work, travel, studies, etc. That is why I say that from the public health and also from the control of the epidemic angle, it is our responsibility to help through participating in the Universal Community Testing Programme. Of course, after all, it is voluntary. The decision rests with every individual. As regards companies and schools, I think it is up to the company to have its policy to determine what measures would be required regarding controlling the epidemic, and also ensuring that the work environment is safe and will prevent any outbreak.

Secretary for Food and Health: Let me also supplement to your questions. The programme is voluntary. As you all know, we have identified a number of cases in the past few days through this Universal Community Testing Programme. On some preliminary analysis of these cases, there are young people, and there are old people. There are also people who are retired, and there are also people who are working and also related to some clusters. Therefore, we strongly encourage those who have not participated to participate. Some of these groups, for example, like foreign domestic helpers, we have already identified two cases through this programme. Therefore, we want to make an appeal to different groups to take the opportunity of this programme to do the test.

If everybody in the community would like to end this third wave (of outbreak) more quickly, it is important for us to know the transmission

chains and to contain them, and also know the symptomatic cases. We want to appeal to everyone to make use of this opportunity to come forward to take the test, and also to help and make a contribution to this very important public health intervention.

Reporter: Secretary Nip, can you give us an update on cases referred to police for investigation of fraudulent use of personal data to register for the programme? How many will be prosecuted? The next two for Professor Chan, the Mental Health Index for this year will be announced today but mental health last year was the worst level for Hongkongers in eight years. Mental health is expected to be aggravated due to COVID-19. What does the Government plan to do to address the mental health issue? And experts are already warning of a fourth wave, how are authorities preparing for it? And do you think the experience of the testing programme will help cope with the fourth wave?

Secretary for the Civil Service: Up till noon today, we received about 246 cases concerning the use of personal data by other people. After investigation, 137 cases have been referred to the Police for further investigation.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your question. As far as mental health is concerned, we have the Advisory Committee on Mental Health headed by Chairman Wong Yan-lung and with many experienced members. One of the key objectives of the Advisory Committee is to oversee the implementation of a report on mental health review published in 2017. Other than that, there are also surveys ongoing on the elders, adults and young people to monitor their mental health situation. We also received or we looked into the international scientific data and local reports on the mental health situation.

In terms of COVID-19, the advisory committee has been looking into the issue and working on some of the programmes – some focusing on the recent issues and some on more general mental health promotion programmes taking place, such as the programme called "Shall We Talk" and also other programmes. Promoting mental health and well-being of the public are actually one of the objectives of the Advisory Committee on Mental Health.

Your other question about the fourth wave and also the prevention and preparation in response to any future waves. We have already started to look into many of the different aspects in preparation for the fourth wave. Of course, one of which is testing capacity. Through the Universal Community Testing Programme, we have actually not only ramped up capacity for this particular programme, but there are also other private laboratories that come into play and are willing to provide testing, for example, in the future the target group testing, testing for people who want to travel (using) the health code and also for public health intervention. All these require testing and testing capacity. The experience that we have adopted through this programme would be very important not only for the testing capacity, but also for the people in Hong Kong, the community that they actually have gone through the test. A large number of them have gone through this test and they are aware of what the test is all about. Also, the other group is health care

professionals, over 6 000 of health care professionals have signed up for this Universal Community Testing Programme. Many of them are professionals and they have also provided the sample collection services through this programme. I am sure this will form a group of health care professionals that is willing and also able to take forward further future testing should this be required again.

Of course there are other measures other than testing, for example our border control measures that we are also going to review; our testing, contact tracing, quarantine and also isolation facilities; and policies we are also going to review and ramp up, for example contact tracing that we are going to have more manpower for contact tracing and increase the facilities for quarantine as well as isolation.

Finally, on social distancing, we have been putting in place social distancing measures through legislation. Of course, the experience that we have gained from the previous waves, this particular wave, would give us a more refined and sophisticated measure in terms of looking at the "suppress and lift" strategy in our prevention and control measures.

Finally is the vaccine procurement, and also our research funding, that we are already supporting two rounds of researches. Some of these data would be coming up, we will look into these data, results or outcomes so that we can be better informed when formulating our strategy in the coming future.

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