

Transcript of remarks by SFH at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, after attending a radio programme today (September 4):

Reporter: Secretary, what do you think of the risk of the Mu mutant strain with the local community so far? Is it still realistic for Hong Kong to keep vaccination as the main shield against COVID-19? Second question, the sector and the Academy of Medicine said yesterday that they were very displeased with the Government's overseas doctor proposal, why the sector was not consulted over the recent amendments? Is the Government just listening to the LegCo Bills Committee?

Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, regarding your question about the Mu variant, whether it is a new variant, variant of concern or any COVID-19 virus, we treat it in a very prudent manner. On one hand, the World Health Organization is closely monitoring the variants and update the "Variant of Concern" category regularly. On the other hand, we are also reviewing all these different variants of concern. The most important thing is that we have very stringent border control measures all the way from before the inbound travellers come to Hong Kong, i.e. they must have a negative PCR (test result) and also a hotel booking certificate. When they arrived, they have to undergo the "test and hold" to ensure that they have a negative test result before they can go. And they have to take designated transportation to designated hotel for quarantine. According to the different risk levels of the countries where they come from, they would have different quarantine period as well as the number of tests being done during quarantine. Also, we have a flight suspension mechanism, if there is a certain number of confirmed case on a flight – that would meet the threshold of flight suspension mechanism, then we will suspend the flights from coming to Hong Kong for 14 days. So with all these stringent border control measures, we will continue to review the global situation in terms of these variants' activities.

Reporter: Any risk to Hong Kong so far?

Secretary for Food and Health: When we have inbound travellers, there are also risks. But all these stringent border control measures that we have instituted are to mitigate all the risks concerned. And because of the frequent testing that we have actually identified confirmed cases not only at the airport but also during the quarantine period.

Reporter: About the overseas doctor proposal?

Secretary for Food and Health: Regarding the non-locally trained doctors proposal, recently the Executive Council has approved three amendments, and I am sure you understand the three amendments. The purpose of the amendments is

to increase the attractiveness of the scheme, so that more doctors can come to Hong Kong to serve in the public system; so that the waiting time for the people in Hong Kong and also the services of the public system provide can be improved; so that our citizens do not have to wait so long if they have health problems. In particular, we are short of specialist doctors. So you can look at our three amendments, the targets are also to the specialist doctors as well. But I must emphasise that, for these amendments, we have maintained the professional standards, and we have not lowered the requirements of these standards of non-locally trained doctors. This is very important and this is something we will always maintain.

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