

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, at a media session at the Legislative Council Complex today (October 12):

Reporter: How many would you left for the territory after the donation regarding the number of jabs you have mentioned? And second question, what if there is a sudden boost in confirmed cases in future, how likely the Government can respond quick enough if there is a sudden boost in demand of vaccination? And the last question, regarding social distancing measures, why are the relaxations only applied in gym room? How does the infection risk different from other places when mass activity is involved?

The Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your three questions. Your first question is about the numbers. Regarding the local procurement of vaccines, both Comirnaty and CoronaVac vaccines, which we have purchased each 7.5 million and together we have 15 million, are sufficient for the use by the Hong Kong population. So we do not need the procurement that we've made on the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is also 7.5 million. And the most important thing is that, because the World Health Organization (WHO) has repeatedly announced that "no one is safe until everyone is safe". If we look at the situation globally, for those low- or middle-low-income countries, the vaccination rate for the first dose is only about 20 per cent. But if you look at the high-income countries, or the middle-high-income countries, the vaccination rate is about 80 per cent. So it is important and appropriate for those places with sufficient vaccines, or even more than sufficient, to donate through the WHO COVAX Facility to those needy countries. In terms of the number of vaccines in Hong Kong, we would have sufficient amount of vaccines even after the donation of 7.5 million doses – the entire procurement we have made on AstraZeneca vaccine originally for Hong Kong.

Reporter: What if there is a sudden boost in demand?

The Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, if we have another wave (of epidemic), the most important thing is for us to be able to prevent and prepare for this wave. The local vaccination rate is about 67 per cent, a little bit more than 67 per cent. We would like to see it goes higher especially among the elderly population. If we look at the elderly population, for example, those who are 70 years old or above, the vaccination rate is only about 30 per cent. But if you look at the percentage of those who are vaccinated below 70 years of age, it is about 70 per cent on average. So it tells us that we need a bigger boost among the elderly population especially when there is a risk of having another wave in the winter. The 15 million doses that we have procured would be sufficient for our entire population. If we look at the current vaccination rate, even if the third dose is necessary, for example, for the elders, we think it would still be

enough.

Regarding your third question about social distancing, obviously we have to be very cautious about any relaxation. If you look at our social distancing measures currently, it is actually based on the "vaccine bubble". That is the first principle. Secondly, if you look at most of the day-to-day resumption of daily activities, we have actually achieved earlier. In the Economist's normalcy index, we ranked No. 1. We never had a lockdown. In terms of the resumption of normal daily life, it is more or less back to normal. I do not think there is a big room for further relaxation. Some of these relaxations we are providing are those which are necessary. For example, regarding the gym room relaxation, the number of people per group is really not a relaxation without condition. It is relaxed when, for example, everybody has been vaccinated. Secondly, they must achieve an air change of six cycles before they can enjoy this relaxation. The relaxation of social distancing measures is not without conditions. Vaccination and air change are very very important in any relaxation.

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