

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

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, at a media session this afternoon (September 2):

Reporter: About the dining ban, I would like to ask why are you not lifting the ban completely? Because by 10pm the busiest dinner hour will be over. And what's the point of having a ban after 10pm? Secondly, we can see that some venues are being reopened, but some, for example like the game arcade, are still being forced to close, so why are they excluded from the reopening plans? Because, for example, the game arcade seems less risky. Finally, about the two-person limit on public gatherings, you said that you cannot relax all restrictions at the same time, but wouldn't it seem a bit difficult to enforce the law when there are so many people on the street? Although they are not together, when adding up, it's a lot more than two people. So what's the point of keeping the two-person-gathering ban? Thank you.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your questions. First of all, regarding lifting, we have always been using the "suppress and lift" strategy in our epidemic control while this third wave of epidemic has been subsiding and also becoming a little bit more stable right now. We still have some cases with unknown sources and also there could be some changes and we have to observe very closely. While we have started some lifting strategy, it is important for us to also balance the infection control measures, the public health interventions and also people's mental health as well as people's expectations and also the overall economic situation in Hong Kong. So after careful consideration, we have decided to slowly and gradually relax some of the current measures. There are a number of factors that we consider in terms of which are the ones we are going to open and whether some of the conditions that we put in are more stringent or less stringent. First of all, I think it is obviously the necessity, for example, eating or dining out is more or less a necessity for people. Why we have extended one hour, it's because many citizens told us that sometimes it seems that it's a bit rushed having dinner because Hong Kong people tend to work late, so slightly extending one hour would hopefully serve the purpose. The catering business has also made this suggestion as well. So this time after our careful consideration, we think this is doable.

Secondly, we have chosen to open some of the schedule premises. Those premises that we have opened are largely sport premises. Because we know that actually many people would like to do some exercises and some sports in the midst of the epidemic which have lasted for about eight months, people are tired and fatigued. So doing some exercises can also bring about physical as well as mental health. We felt that this is something that would have some priorities.

Third, regarding Cap. 599G, as I have already said earlier, while

selecting or considering which are the premises or the measures that we are relaxing, we have to consider not only the epidemic situation, the number of confirmed cases, but we are also looking at multiple factors, including the mobility of people. While this virus is quite virulent and we understand that the infectivity is high and the transmissibility is high. So in relaxing any measures, we have to be very careful. Not only are we careful in relaxing the number of people, we also appeal to the public that it is important for them to keep vigilant in terms of mask wearing and also personal and environmental hygiene. But of course, to give some hope to the public, we feel that it is important given this epidemic situation not only happen in Hong Kong but globally it is a pandemic. So this is going to be a long battle that we are going to fight together, not only the Government, but also with the people in Hong Kong. So we felt that we need to have some gradual, slow relaxations and at the same time be very vigilant and also keep tracking the entire situation. And more importantly, that's why we appeal to the people of Hong Kong to participate in this universal community testing. Given this opportunity and the support and assistance provided by the Central People's Government to us that we can have this big scale of testing in a very short time. So then we can identify the silent carriers in the community so that we can hopefully cut the transmission chain effectively once and for all. But of course we understand that even after we have found out the confirmed cases from the universal community testing, people still need to continue their vigilance in terms of mask wearing, keeping social distancing as well as personal and environmental hygiene. So I think this is the thoughts that we have, we would have to find a way to enter into this new normal. It is important for us to know the infectivity situation in the community, because we would expect there will be sporadic cases given the global pandemic.

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