

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

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, met the media today (November 12) on the outbreaks of upper respiratory tract infection at schools, with the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Wong Ka-hing; the Principal Assistant Secretary (Kindergarten Education) Policy Support of the Education Bureau, Ms Louise So; and the Assistant Director (Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services) of Social Welfare Department, Ms Hannah Yip. Following is the transcript of remarks by Professor Chan at the media session:

Reporter: Firstly, can the authority be sure that the outbreak is not related to COVID-19 virus and if it is about common cold? Could it be a bit over-reactive to suspend the classes for two weeks in kindergartens? Secondly, we saw outbreaks in primary schools as well, would the authority consider suspending face-to-face classes and lessons there as well? Is there a high possibility that the suspension of classes would be longer than the two weeks because we are entering into a peak flu season and COVID-19 did not seem to subdue in the meantime? Is there a high possibility the suspension of classes would be longer? Thank you.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your questions. First of all, so far according to our tests and our information, this upper respiratory outbreak is not related to COVID-19. So far, from all the tests, we have not found any COVID-19 cases. However, as we all know that children, young children attending kindergartens (KG) and child care centres (CCC) are very small, first of all. Secondly, in spite of the measures put in place by the school and also personal hygiene, mask wearing, etc, but yet, we notice these outbreak reports, so it is very worrying. Therefore, we have made the decision to suspend the face-to-face classes or services in the territory-wide kindergartens and child care centres. Your second question is about primary schools. Yes, we have also noticed that there are some outbreaks in primary schools. But in primary schools, the situation is slightly better in a few aspects. First of all, children in primary schools are slightly bigger, so their self-care ability is slightly better. Secondly, because in primary schools, there are different classes, so when there are outbreaks, the outbreak is within the class, not the entire school. So the containment would be slightly easier. And third, the number of outbreaks right now that we have noticed in the KG/CCC is much bigger – about 60 per cent of the outbreaks are actually from KG/CCC. So, we have made the decision to suspend the classes, the face-to-face classes as well as the services of KG/CCC. We will be monitoring very closely other outbreaks in primary schools, perhaps even secondary schools. So these are some of our considerations. Your third question is about whether the suspension would be longer than two weeks. Of course, first of all, I think we have to be very vigilant not only in our infection control measures, but also monitoring the local situation. We try to put it at two weeks first, but if the situation is getting worse, or the

local situation is not getting better, then we would not rule out the possibility of extending the suspension. Of course, the relevant bureaux or departments will closely look into the situation and working with kindergartens and also CCCs. The Department of Health will be monitoring the outbreaks as well. Thank you.

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