

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 (November 20) about the latest situation of COVID-19:

Reporter: Professor Chan, several experts have said that the fourth wave has officially started, is it your view that the fourth wave officially started today in Hong Kong, can you confirm that?

Dr Chan, you have just said that the upper respiratory tract outbreaks have been more severe than last year and have been rising more rapidly, can you give us some figures to prove that, to compare this year's figures with last year's to show why it is much more severe and much more rapid?

Professor Chan, why have you suspended junior primary schools when there haven't been one case of COVID-19 found in those upper respiratory tract infected students, but why have you instead not announced any implementation date for hotel staycations and for mandatory testing, when there have been several cases linked to the hotel staycation groups, why are the relevant bureaux still considering that when you have already announced school suspension for junior primary schools? Professor Yuen today also recommended that the border strategy is not "water tight", that's his words. So he suggested that perhaps the quarantine period for travellers from high risk places has to be extended to 21 days, and he also said that perhaps there should be no food served in primary schools. Is that what you will be considering? Would you take up his suggestions and implement in those areas as well?

Finally, can I just get some clarifications from Professor Chan, because we are not quite sure that the dance studios are under the regulation of Cap. 599F. We have seen some cases linked to the Starlight Dance Club. Can you confirm whether dance studios are actually one of those 14 scheduled premises? And if not, why not?

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your questions. First of all, just very quickly to answer your question on Starlight Dance Club. The Home Affairs Bureau is looking into whether these kind of dancing studios are considered as party rooms, for example, so we are actively looking into that. But in any case, if there is such a cluster – people are dancing and do not wear masks – it is very high risk, and therefore I would appeal to people to stop all the unnecessary gatherings because the situation is severe now in Hong Kong.

Of course, according to the experts and also the information from the Centre for Health Protection, we have probably entered into a new wave of cases. But of course we are now doing our best, and before this severe situation started, in the past week, we have already tightened many of our

measures, including border control measures, quarantine measures, hotel regulation measures, and also some of the social distancing measures. We have also ramped up our testing capacity and set up four community testing centres, and also improved the accessibility of people getting tested, not only the distribution of bottles, but also getting tested in our centres.

We will continue to tighten the measures. If you remember back in September, we have already listed six major areas in preparation for the fourth wave, so that our capacity, and also many of our current measures, can be executed as soon as possible in response to this wave.

Regarding your question about the timing of mandatory testing, the law is already here, and we will be issuing directions for mandatory testing for the three groups that I have earlier listed – those who have symptoms, residential elderly homes staff, and also taxi drivers. On staycation, as I have said earlier, we met with the hotel industry last night and ironed out all the details that we would like the hotel industry to follow. Many of those instructions and measures, some of the hotels are already following or executing. But now that we have the law, we want to be very clear that we will be issuing the directions to the hotels as soon as possible.

We have been in communication with our experts very frequently, all our four experts including Professor Yuen. We will definitely look into his suggestions and will consider the suggestions. The border control measures, Professor Yuen has actually said many times that there is no way for it to be "water tight", and therefore we must do more at different junctures, different points, in terms of border control measures. Before people come into Hong Kong, for example, we require pre-departure tests; also we stop flights if they have more confirmed cases. Most recently we have tightened our testing measures at the airport, everybody has to be tested at the airport. We have also been increasing the number of high risk countries under Cap. 599H, and we have also required returnees from all countries except China to have hotel quarantine rather than home quarantine. We will look into the science and the quarantine period to see how best we can actually be more "water tight" in these measures.

Regarding no food in primary schools, we have made a recommendation to the Education Bureau about mask-off activities. I think it would be the best if students would severely cut down all mask-off activities, including extra-curricular activities and so on.