

## Transcript of remarks by SLW on allowing foreign domestic helpers fully vaccinated in Indonesia or the Philippines to come to work in Hong Kong

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on allowing foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) fully vaccinated in Indonesia or the Philippines to come to work in Hong Kong, at a stand-up media session after attending the meeting of the Legislative Council this afternoon (August 26):

Reporter: Secretary, first of all, we were also asking about it. Since there is one hotel with about 400 rooms and there are thousands of helpers waiting to come to Hong Kong to work, how would the priorities be set for the employers and workers? Would that be on a first-come, first-served basis? Or is there any other (inaudible) for that? The second question, the Government is advising the employers to check the authenticity of the vaccination records, so how do you expect the employers to do that? Will they face legal liabilities if the vaccination records are found to be fake? And the third question, is there any mechanism if there is a high proportion of helpers tested positive? Will there be a mechanism to stop the whole scheme?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: In fact all the three questions are very much related. Perhaps I should answer in this way. Again the whole issue is how to balance the need for the families in Hong Kong to employ domestic helpers to look after the elderly, young children or the other needs that require the FDHs to help. That is a huge demand. On the other hand, we have to be very cautious and careful because of the COVID-19 variant, particularly the Delta has been spreading around and we have to ensure that we will not be allowing the virus to infiltrate into our community. Thus, we on one hand have to strike the balance between the demand of the families needing to employ FDHs and, on the other hand, we have to reduce the risk of having the virus coming into our community. Thus, we have to do it steadily and step by step.

So by August 30, we just have one hotel and the procedure is just the same as ever before. For those who need to come to Hong Kong, they have to buy an air ticket and get a reservation of a hotel required for that particular purpose so that they can come. It will not be centrally managed. It will definitely be a first-come, first-served arrangement in existing procedures. At the end of the day, we have to ensure that the numbers are carefully monitored. I am optimistic because the 409 rooms will not be occupied on one single day, probably a couple of days. Looking at the records in the past couple of days, of people coming to Hong Kong who were fully vaccinated and yet infected – because they are required to have a valid full

vaccination record and at the same time have a negative PCR test result within 72 hours (negative result proof of a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 with specimen collected within 72 hours) before they can board the plane to Hong Kong – so the number and percentage should be relatively small. But just in case the number of positive is very large, we have our existing mechanism to stop flights coming to Hong Kong. Somehow, as I said, the number of rooms is only 409, so even if we do not stop the planes coming to Hong Kong they will not be able to board the plane because they will not be able to book a hotel. But as I also mentioned earlier, we have to monitor it closely. We are actually looking forward to engaging another hotel for this purpose and are also exploring other possibilities, but it depends on the progress, the risk we are facing and the whole situation at these places of origin for FDHs. You would probably be aware that in the Philippines, the number of cases has been increasing very rapidly recently. So, we have to basically monitor the situation day after day.

I have to clarify that employers do not have legal responsibilities to check the vaccination record. It is the duty – when FDHs check in for the plane at that particular place, they will check whether that is a valid vaccination record issued or it is validated by the Government there. Also our port health at the entry has the duty to look at that. The duty does not rest on the employers but for sure if they really want to look at them themselves, they can do it but they have no legal responsibilities or liabilities to do so.

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