

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (December 11). Also joining were the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; and the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: First about the hotels, designated hotels for quarantine. You mentioned that you expect at least 1 000 people to come for the first seven days this policy started. But you also said there are around 12 000 rooms gonna be prepared for these measures, so are there enough rooms to house that many people coming in because according to official data, the amount of people arriving at Hong Kong Airport for the past 14 days already exceeded 12 000 people, so if there aren't enough rooms to accommodate so many people, what would be the arrangements? China and Singapore and other cities have already used and implemented this measure for so long. Why did it take the Hong Kong Government almost one year to come up with this measure and enforce this? Second question regarding the vaccines, is there any timetable on when those people with priority can start getting vaccinated? Could it be as early as January or February? The Chinese-made coronavirus vaccine is likely going to be the first batch of vaccines, gonna arrive in Hong Kong and be used in Hong Kong, so what would you say to some people who are concerned whether the vaccine is safe to be used and effective or not?

Secretary for the Civil Service: On designated hotels, actually when we come to the target number of 10 000 rooms, and now we got 12 000 rooms, we have made reference to the number of arrivals at the airport in the previous months and made an estimation. Each day a certain number of people would be arriving and then staying at the designated hotels for 14 days, so you need to project an accumulative figure. Based on this, we estimate that with the current 12 000 hotel rooms, it should be enough to accommodate the demand. But of course, because the pandemic situation globally keeps changing and there are a lot of unforeseen circumstances, we do not have a crystal ball so we need to closely monitor the demand and supply. We would be in close touch with the hotel sector, and if necessary, we could increase the number of designated hotels. As regards this designated hotel measure, of course the concept of using hotels for quarantine first came up at the early stage of the epidemic. But if you look back at the early stage of the epidemic, I think the hotel sector, or the hotels, was pretty hesitant or even reluctant to use hotels for quarantine purpose for very understandable reasons. And then as things developed, we witnessed that some of the hotels, more and more hotels, accepted quarantine guests. Starting from November 13, we put in the requirements for all arrivals from places other than China to be subject to a 14-day mandatory hotel quarantine. On that basis, with the support of the

hotel sector, our discussion with them was on a proper framework on one hand to address their concern, on the other hand allowing a sufficient number of hotel rooms. Then we come to the stage that we could have these designated hotels in place. With colleagues' dedicated efforts, we have actually made our utmost to have the scheme implemented as early as possible. Though of course everyone wish that this had been implemented sooner rather than later but it applies to all other measures in dealing with the epidemic.

Chief Executive: As regards your question on when the priority groups could receive the vaccination, the answer is as soon as possible. We are according top priority to the two follow-ups that I have just outlined. One is to enact another regulation under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance, that is Chapter 599, to provide a legal framework for us to authorise the use of the vaccines on an emergency basis. I suppose as far as work on our side that should not be too difficult because we are in control of the legislative exercise. I have explained why these agreements are called "advance purchase", because unlike in the normal situation where vaccines are authorised and marketed before we buy, on this occasion it's not just Hong Kong, everywhere in the world they are buying or entering into purchase agreement when the vaccines have yet to complete several things. One is the clinical trial, the phase three clinical trial, the other is authorisation in their respective jurisdictions and finally is on to the market. So our agreement is also subject to the chosen vaccines having completed those aspects of work. When they have completed and we have completed our emergency authorisation of the use of vaccines, I would expect that we could start the vaccination program, particularly with the high-risk groups, for example healthcare workers. I will look to Dr Ko to administer these vaccine for the high-risk workers in the hospitals and also the elderly patients. That's the answer I want to give to your question.

Regarding the first question which has already been answered by the Secretary for the Civil Service, I will just appeal to all in society that in every place the anti-epidemic strategy has to look at the context, the social, economic and political situation in that particular place. In our situation we are almost unique and complicated because the pandemic hit us while we were still fighting the riots and the social unrest, and when many people, including the hotel owners, were very worried about supporting the Government in anything because then they will be harassed, intimidated and doxed and so on. I could tell you from my personal experience very early in the process, I rang up several hotel owners and tried to seek their support to allow the use of a hotel for either a holding hotel, that is the test and hold regime, or for quarantine. It was never agreed because of the worry. But I'm pleased to say that after this whole period and with the enactment of the national security law, the chaos have been removed and peace and order have been restored. We are delighted with this very positive response from owners this time around. If you ask me a month ago, I'm still worried whether they will be forthcoming to join this designated hotel scheme, but I am very pleased that they now see the need to join hands with the Government under a safer environment to do this thing.

To answer your other question how I can convince the people of Hong Kong

that if it is a Mainland vaccine it's safe for use. My response is don't get involved in politics. Look at it in a totally de-politicised perspective. This is about science. This is about evidence. The experts have looked at it and these drugs will be authorised for use not only in Hong Kong but in other places of the world. That should be the approach that one should take in dealing with various aspects of fighting this pandemic together.

Reporter: The first question regarding the allocation of the vaccines, will Hongkongers, will the public get to choose what type of vaccines they're getting? And how would they be distributed? Will they all be distributed by the public health authorities or will there be private sectors selling them as well? The second question is, regarding the hotel arrangement, we've seen, Mr Nip had just said 80 per cent of the hotels would come under the price of less than \$1,000. But we're talking about \$1,000, which is still quite a bit of amount of money, so will there be a mismatch that because of this price concern, that some of the hotel rooms will be left unfilled? Is that a problem that you have taken into consideration? The final question is for Mrs Lam. I noticed that when you started your opening, you were saying that by the end of 2021, the majority of Hong Kong people would get the vaccines by that time. Why do you say majority, not the whole of Hong Kong? What was your reservation? And, you know, when will Hong Kong see the light at the end of the tunnel of this pandemic? And you also have summarised what you have done and achieved in the past year. What would be the score you gave yourself in the past year and were you proud and satisfied of what you have achieved so far? Thank you.

Secretary for the Civil Service: Regarding the hotel price, it's important for us to get sufficient rooms and also a range of hotels to meet different needs. For hotel rooms, 80 per cent of them are basically charged less than \$1,000 per day. About 13 per cent are charged below \$500 a day, and they amount to more than 1 500 rooms.

We actually compared the distribution of this price range with, for example, the passenger arrivals in Hong Kong and also the distribution of these passengers staying at various hotels, and tried to compare the distribution of these passenger arrivals staying at hotels of various price ranges. And basically the distributions are pretty similar. We are confident that with this range of supply, it should be ready to meet the various needs of the passengers.

Chief Executive: About the vaccination programme, since these vaccines are to be authorised for emergency use, which means that they may not be readily available on the market, so at the moment what I could see is this is very much a government vaccination programme. The purchase, the administration, the prioritisation and distribution will all be government-managed. In other words, the private practitioner may not be able to buy the vaccine and administer in his own clinic on a fee-paying basis. We may engage the private practitioners to help administer the vaccine but it's still a government vaccination programme. If it is a government vaccination programme, the use of vaccine at a particular point in time for a particular category of the priority groups will be decided by the Government. This is especially so

because somebody has asked that one of the vaccines we now have in-principle agreement, this Pfizer, is very challenging. It's very challenging in terms of logistics because the temperature is -70 degrees Celsius. It's also very challenging in terms of administration – it needs to be diluted and then it has to be finished within a very short period of time, so we believe that perhaps if the Pfizer vaccine is to be used, it has to be in a much more sophisticated clinical environment. That would dictate which vaccine would be used by which group. That's the situation.

I can't find my exact term in Chinese but I did not say by end 2021. I said during 2021 the great majority of Hong Kong people will be vaccinated because this is voluntary. I cannot run a mandatory vaccination programme. If I couldn't run it even for flu, which is so well-established, the vaccines are so well-recognised, how could I run a compulsory vaccination programme for an emergency vaccine? It much depends on whether people are forthcoming enough to be vaccinated in order to protect themselves, their family and society at large. And also, maybe, there will be an incentive that if vaccination could lead to travel, then I'm sure more people will come forward to receive the vaccine.

Fighting an epidemic is a very solemn and serious government endeavour, it's not a beauty contest, so I'm not going to give any score to myself or to my team except to clarify that when I recapped the eight aspects of work in fighting the epidemic, it is not the work of Mrs Carrie Lam. It's not my work alone, it's collective efforts of everybody in the Hong Kong SAR Government. Of course some colleagues play a more major role, others play a less major role in the epidemic, but everybody plays a part in fighting this epidemic. I would appeal to society at large to also adopt that very civic responsibility and solidarity approach in fighting this epidemic. When can we see the light at the end of the tunnel? If I may quote from Dr Tedros, the World Health Organization Director-General, on December 4 on vaccines, he said that with positive results in recent weeks from vaccine trials, the light at the end of a tunnel is growing steadily brighter. He also added that although the path ahead remains treacherous, we can begin to glimpse the end of the pandemic. It's not smooth sailing yet when we receive the vaccine and start vaccination, there could still be all sorts of complications in a society like Hong Kong but we will strive ahead and make sure that people will return to their normal life as soon as possible. Thank you.

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