

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, held a press conference today (July 27). Also joining were the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong; the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui; the Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Mr Thomas Chan; 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: Thank you Mr Cheung. Three questions. In hindsight, do you think the Government maybe has acted too slowly, or in particular with this all-day dining ban, has perhaps not been decisive enough with the actions taken? Secondly on takeaway services, is there going to be any incentive for restaurants to stay open to provide these services to people who may not be able to work from home, and do you think maybe you're shifting the risk that exists within restaurants to offices and parks and streets, wherever people may be having their lunch instead? And finally, you mentioned a little bit there but is there any thought maybe to further tightening the testing and quarantine arrangements for people who are currently exempted, particularly in terms of, sort of, limiting their movement around Hong Kong?

Chief Secretary for Administration: We've been adopting the right approach all along – the approach is “lift and suppress” on the basis of scientific evidence, on the basis of expert advice, not on the basis of political sentiment or political decision. This is very important, it is scientifically based. That's why, when the situation warrants, we'll then “supress”. What's happening now, we're now really tightening up the measures, and if the situation permits, then of course we'll be less stringent, enable, for example, more interaction, less stringent requirements on the social distancing and so on and so forth. So it's a flexible, pragmatic strategy which strikes a balance. It's just like a three-way tug-of-war between protecting the public health on one hand, economic impact and finally, the other side of the equation of course is public acceptance. We call it (anti-epidemic) fatigue and so on. So we have to strike a balance every time, a delicate balance. There is no straightforward answer to any situation but we will exercise our judgement in the light of the data, in the light of expert advice and in the light of Hong Kong's practical circumstances. So no dining all day, this sort of requirement is pretty stringent, but I suppose some fast food shops already get used to it. Some major restaurants, they find it difficult. But at the end of the day, I think the whole object of course is to reduce social distancing, encouraging employers, for example, to have their employees work from home. In fact, home office now is getting increasingly popular, have two shifts and so on. Even for the civil service, I think 60 per cent of our staff are now really getting back on duty, 40 per cent normally stay at home now, so we are not talking about a reduction in

public service, but that's the price that we need to pay. That's why I call on employers in Hong Kong, make a strong appeal to them, that if possible, allow their staff, their employees, to work from home. This is point number one. Quarantine of course, we are now stepping up the quarantine requirement. Testing, I will invite Professor Chan to elaborate on that, we are doing a lot now, testing on all fronts. We are even talking about launching a free testing scheme in Tsz Wan Shan, because it's a highly affected area, a public housing estate there, so I will invite Professor Chan, (who) will also go into that later on, and Mr Tsui, Secretary for Home Affairs, will supplement on that point – free testing.

Secretary for Food and Health: Regarding testing, the Government has always been expanding the testing capacity and also the testing areas, trying to have early detection, early isolation and also early treatment.

In this particular epidemic wave, we have expanded the testing not only in an outbreak investigation situation, confirmed cases and close contact; but also, we have identified four high risk groups, whereby we have purchased some private testing capacity in order to deal with these very big numbers, namely staff of elderly homes, taxi drivers, staff of catering business, and also management and security frontline people. We believe that these high risk groups are really in the forefront and that it is important to test them, especially when we look at the data during this epidemic wave, whereby there are a number of people among these high risk groups are being confirmed COVID-19.

Earlier, I have already given some numbers about the testing. Different groups will have different logistics in terms of the testing, some would require on-site testing, some maybe can just distribute the bottles and then collect the specimen afterwards.

Regarding the Chief Secretary's remarks about the Tsz Wan Shan area, where there are lots of confirmed cases, the Home Affairs Department is working with the Tung Wah Group in trying to launch a programme of testing on people in the public housing estates in this area. It will be launching soon. Once they have the details, I am sure HAD will announce.

Secretary for Home Affairs: In terms of the Tsz Wan Shan community testing programme, we aim to have some of the supplies ready in a few days. Wong Tai Sin District Office's colleagues are going to be on site to explain the logistics to residents. We hope to complete the testing in Tsz Wan Shan community within two weeks and that would cover close to 40 000 residents living in those public estates.

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