

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference today (August 21). 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 Development, Mr Michael Wong; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; and the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Thank you Mrs Lam, a couple of follow-up questions. Have your scientific advisors given you, sort of, what number would be a good minimum for this community-wide testing scheme to make it worthwhile and if so few people may volunteer, do you think that the Government would consider offering sort of like an incentive, maybe a cash incentive for people to take part? And on that point about the health code, can you just definitively say that the Government will be completely ruling out that idea of a local health code system? And Sophia Chan, just one question, on the vaccine, can you just tell us a bit more about what the Government is doing in terms of trying to acquire those vaccine and how many in total you would really want to cover Hong Kong?

Chief Executive: As far as the universal community testing, from the experts, I mean my four experts on the panel, from the very beginning, testing is regarded as very important by the experts, especially by Professor Yuen, because it is through testing that we could identify as early as possible the infected cases and then put them under isolation and treatment so that there will be no chance for the disease to spread. There is no doubt about the value of testing.

The second question, depending on the capacity of every place, you have to prioritise your testing arrangements. All along, we have been focusing on testing what we called the higher risk groups – those who have symptoms, those who are arriving from abroad, those who go to see private doctors and so on. And a month ago, we started to extend this testing because we have more capacity. We extend the testing to what we called the specified groups: staff working in elderly homes, nursing homes, and staff working in restaurants and also staff working in property management companies and transport sector and so on. If capacity continues to be a constraint, then this type of universal community testing free of charge available to asymptomatic people may not be a priority. But given the severity of this current wave and the fact that we still have 30 to 40 per cent of cases with unknown sources, which means that there is still quite a lot of, quite a number of, silent transmitters in community, the more that we could test, the earlier we could find the remaining outstanding cases. Since the Central People's Government has come forward to help us to provide this additional capacity through the additional laboratories that you have seen in one of our

sports venues, through mobilising several hundreds of technicians to help us to test in order to meet the requirements of this universal community testing, we now have the ability to proceed, to do this less-a-priority testing, let's put it that way. But this is a one-off exercise. I don't envisage that we could continue to do it and it would not be very cost effective to keep on doing a universal community testing of this nature. And that's why we have not set for ourselves any targets. Our objective is to encourage as many Hong Kong people to come forward to receive this free-of-charge type of testing so that they can be assured of their own situation and they can help us and help society to recover as soon as possible. The test is free of charge. The testing arrangements will be very simple and the testing stations will be very convenient. I think those are the incentives that we have designed in rolling out this community mass testing. At the end of the day, it is the conscientiousness and the civic responsibility of every Hong Kong citizen that count, so again I repeated my appeal to the people of Hong Kong that please come forward to do this universal community testing.

As far as the health code, I notice that you use the word "local" health code and maybe that's a good way to describe it. Health code by itself is not very meaningful, as what is the purpose of the health code? The health code contains some very basic information about this individual and more importantly about the health status of this individual, so in the case of COVID-19, the most relevant health status of this individual is whether he or she has received a test and the result is negative, and hence, he or she can travel within a limited period. The health code that we have been working on so far and had discussions with Guangdong and with Macao is for travelling. Similarly that same health code will be used for travelling to overseas countries, once we have the "travel bubble" in place with other countries. It is not a sort of health code for access to local institutions or catering or things like that. It's just not practicable to have a health code in Hong Kong for that purpose.

Secretary for Food and Health: Regarding vaccine procurement, currently there are a number of candidates having vaccine researches such as clinical trials for safety and efficacy evaluation. We know that there will be very keen global competition. Hong Kong needs to take early actions to reserve or procure potential vaccines for our population in a timely manner. In this regard, we will pursue a two-pronged strategy for procurement of vaccines. On one hand, we plan to make a binding commitment to participate in a COVAX Facility co-led by Gavi (the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and also the World Health Organization. This would be a safety net to secure vaccines for about 20 per cent of the Hong Kong population. But, at the same time, we will also pursue additional supplies through the Advance Purchase Agreements with individual vaccine developers having regard to the scientific evidence and clinical data available in consultation with the scientific committee under the Department of Health. So, we will be closely monitoring the situation. The Chief Executive has also written to the Central People's Government to register our request for support when Mainland vaccines are available.

Reporter: First of all, questions about the vaccine procurement. Professor

Chan, I understand that joining those alliances, actually the Government might have to pay some money in advance. So far how much money has the Hong Kong Government earmarked in the vaccine procurement and how many drug makers actually has the Government made contact with or made agreement with? I mean now there are actually more than 20 types of vaccines that have already entered human clinical trials. How many types of those vaccines the Government is aiming to procure? And secondly, regarding the universal testing scheme, so Mrs Lam, you have been urging the public to join the scheme. Would you and all the senior officials join the testing, like setting an example to encourage the public to join? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I answer your second question. Definitely. We will be the first to put ourselves through the universal community testing. I can assure you that.

Secretary for Food and Health: Regarding vaccine procurement, we found that there are a number of candidates now going through clinical trials for safety and efficacy evaluation. I think less than 10 have entered Phase 3 clinical trials. Right now, I understand that the global competition is actually ongoing. As far as the alliance, the COVAX Facility, is concerned, we have joined the COVAX so that we can obtain the latest information. As far as the price is concerned, it is still fluctuating, so we have already reserved resources for the down payment. In this regard, we do not have to worry about resources. Regarding the Advance Purchase Agreements, because a number of Phase 3 clinical trials are still ongoing, we are now trying our best to obtain the scientific information and the latest data from them, so that those data can be assessed by our scientific committee under the Department of Health before we make decision, which hopefully would be as soon as possible.

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