

# Transcript of remarks of press conference on anti-epidemic measures

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on anti-epidemic measures this morning (April 9). Also joining was the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: The first question is concerning the voluntary RAT (rapid antigen test). We'd like to ask the Government about the statistics. How many infection cases yesterday does the Government believe originate from the voluntary RAT? And also we are aware of some cases of people who haven't done the test yet, especially some elderly and those living in the subdivided flats. So what are the remedies for the Government to help these people to do the test? We are also aware of cases of some people living in hotels and serviced apartments did not get the (anti-epidemic) service bags to do the voluntary RAT. So what are the arrangements for the Government to help provide these people with RAT kits? And the second question is about vaccination rate, as we are aware that the vaccination rate for children remains low. So what are the measures will the Government take to boost this vaccination rate, and how will the Government encourage parents who are still hesitant to let their children be vaccinated to get the vaccines? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the two questions. We started a three-day daily RAT, that's the rapid antigen test, (exercise) yesterday, and I have made repeated appeals that every member of the Hong Kong community should participate for the very good objectives of helping the Government to have a better picture. It's like a snapshot of the overall infection situation in Hong Kong, which I'm sure will be beneficial to our formulating the next stage of anti-COVID-19 policies. The second objective is a very tangible one because, particularly for the Omicron variant, a very large percentage of the infected persons do not have symptoms and so may not know that they have been infected. If they don't know that they have been infected and they go around the community or have very close contacts with their family members, this would help the virus to spread. So we have made this very strong urge that for either one of the objectives, people of Hong Kong should take an active part in the RAT exercise.

In order to make sure that people will easily and readily participate, the Government has done a lot of things to make sure that everyone will have a good supply of RAT kits. So we spent a week to pack all these 3.5 million anti-epidemic service bags, we spent a few days to visit the households in order to distribute the bags. According to my latest data, we have already distributed 3.1 million bags to 2.7 million households in Hong Kong. But we all know that sometimes the people were not at home and they might have missed our distributing team, so we set up throughout the territory 89 distribution points in order to enable the households and individuals to collect their service bags and also those who just want to walk in to collect more RAT kits. These 89 distribution points started to operate on April 7.

According to my data, we have already distributed an additional 92 000 service bags and an additional 270 000 RAT kits. These are all the work we have done in order to encourage people to take part. But at the end of the day, this is voluntary, we cannot guarantee how many people will participate. Actually, by now you should know that even if it is mandatory, just like the "restriction-testing declaration" that we are still doing every day in individual buildings, there are still non-compliance cases, ranging from 1 per cent to 3 per cent. This is the Hong Kong society – people treasure a lot their freedom to do one thing or to do another thing. But the Government will never give up. We will continue to encourage, persuade and make it easy for people to participate. That's why, at the very beginning, we already said that for those who are unable to read the instructions in English, we have APIs (Announcements in the Public Interest), one-minute videos, being showed at the various housing estates on how to do RAT. These are the work that we have been doing. And for people who live at hotels or serviced apartments, they are more than welcome to walk in to any of the 89 distribution points to collect either a service bag or additional RAT kits to enable themselves to participate.

You asked about statistics. I do not have the exact figures in hand except that I was told that, by midnight yesterday, the number of self-declared positive cases based on the Centre for Health Protection's self-declaration online system was a figure higher than that of the preceding day. If you look at the figures over the last two weeks, whether it is the PCR (polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid) test positive or RAT test positive, the two figures are coming down. In the last few days or so, the two sources of positive cases put together would give a figure of about two to three thousand every day. If we had not done this or encouraged people to do the daily RAT test, one would expect the figures, whether the PCR or RAT one, to continue to trend down. But I'm now telling you that, for this afternoon's announcement, as far as the RAT positive cases are concerned, it will be a figure higher than that of the preceding day. That illustrates that the daily RAT exercise does have its impact in identifying infected cases who have not been identified because these people without symptoms would not have gone forward to do a PCR or RAT test.

Since you asked about statistics, I may as well elaborate on a figure that appeared in many of the newspapers' headlines this morning – the figure of 30 000 that I mentioned yesterday. This is a projection based on a study done by The University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health, what they call a point prevalence surveillance study. In other words, through a sample of 10 000 Hong Kong people and requiring them periodically to do the RAT and report the result, that is the positive result, they can put together and give us a point prevalence – in Chinese "點 prevalence" – at that point in time what the infection rate in Hong Kong is. People who tested positive in this exercise would (include) people who have been infected and have self-declared to the Centre for Health Protection but have not recovered. If you put them through RAT and their Ct value is still quite low, that is the viral load is still quite high, the test will give them two lines and so they are still positive cases. The other part will be those who are, as I mentioned, asymptomatic, but having taken the RAT they discover that they test positive.

Now, the 30 000 figure was projected or estimated from the point prevalence percentage on April 6, which was 0.56. By applying this 0.56 per cent to the overall population of Hong Kong, that is 7.4 million people, and then assuming that about one quarter of those have been infected but have not yet recovered and the three quarters freshly infected, then one could derive the figure of about 30 000. You could do your own calculation. The latest point prevalence percentage on the website of The University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health on April 7 has dramatically fallen to 0.26, so immediately the projected figure of 30 000 yesterday would become 14 000 today. I hope you follow my calculations. And less than 10 000 would be those who have been infected but have not yet recovered. There is also one thing that I discovered yesterday: that these three quarters and one quarter may not be very accurate, because in Hong Kong we still have two to three thousand newly infected and confirmed cases every day. Assuming that these people will take at least four to five days to recover, then I would imagine at any point in time, if you take a snapshot of the 7.4 million population, there will be 6 000 to 7 000 people who have been infected but have not yet recovered. Putting this 6 000 to 7 000 to the 14 000 I mentioned is not one quarter, it's almost half. So, taking all these factors into consideration, one would not expect the daily RAT (exercise) to reveal a very high number of newly confirmed cases. I want to give you this background because, later this afternoon, you might receive a figure which is not very high, but actually we should be very happy with a figure which is not very high as a result of a daily RAT exercise, which means that the Government will have plenty of capacity to take care of these newly infected cases, either in transporting them to the CIF, the community isolation facility, or through the Innovation and Technology Bureau to distribute service bags to them and arrange online medical consultation and so on.

About your second question on vaccination, we are actually disappointed that it has reached a sort of level which is moving upwards very slowly, particularly amongst the children. I think the population aged 3 to 11 with the first dose as at 8pm yesterday was 62 per cent, when a week ago it was already 60 per cent. This slow progress of children taking the vaccine is very worrying, because schools are about to resume face-to-face learning after the Easter holiday. I think yesterday, together with the Secretary for the Civil Service and the Secretary for Food and Health, we already elaborated on the many support measures that we have rolled out in order to promote and encourage vaccination. Particularly for children, we have special centres for children to take the jab. If you have visited one, just as I have done, which is in the Gleneagles Hospital Hong Kong, they have made the environment so pleasant – there's a lot of cartoons here and there so the children need not worry about taking the jab. But at the end of the day, this is up to the parents. So again, I appeal to parents who have young children that they should arrange for their vaccination as early as possible. My experts, particularly Professor Lau Yu-lung and Professor Ivan Hung, who are clinicians – one in internal medicine, the other in paediatrics – look after cases of infection; especially Professor Lau looks after children, so we have to trust him that although some said that the Omicron variant is mild, it could hit children without vaccination very seriously. I hope that we will all encourage and promote and urge the parents to get their kids vaccinated

as early as possible. Thank you.

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