

Transcript of remarks of press conference on anti-epidemic measures (with photo/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference today (January 22). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan; the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui; and the Assistant Director of Housing (Estate Management), Mr Ian Luk. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: So, with tens of thousands of residents required to get tested, how will the authorities reduce the risk of them getting infected while waiting to get tested? And secondly, will the Government consider compensating the residents of the five blocks in Kwai Chung Estate for the five-day lockdown, as some of them may not be able to go to work during this period? And lastly, does the current outbreak at the Kwai Chung Estate show that it's simply quite impossible to prevent the spread of the Omicron variant? Would the Government consider adjusting the current zero-COVID policy? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I will invite Dr Tsui to answer the question on how we could reduce infections while arranging the residents to undergo the tests. On the question of compensation, my response is, in an epidemic of this nature, inevitably businesses and individuals will be affected to varying extents. Some will be more affected, some will be less affected, but inevitably a lot of people will be affected because we have put in so many measures on social distancing, on restricting people's movement, on compelling people to take tests and so on. I hope that we are acting in concert to tackle this COVID-19 epidemic. At the moment, it is not a question of compensation. It is a question of getting out of the COVID-19 epidemic, especially relating to the Omicron variant, as soon as possible. And of course, apart from this sort of lockdown of people, we have been putting a lot of people in quarantine for a much longer period, so they will be out of a job for a much longer period. But they are making the sacrifice in order to contribute to the anti-epidemic efforts of Hong Kong, and I'm extremely grateful to all those people who have been adversely affected as a result of these measures.

Now, people have been asking about this COVID-zero policy. I have said it many times – it is not absolute zero. In Chinese it's "å<•æ...<æ,...é>¶" ("dynamic zero infection"). It's a form of trying to tackle whenever there is a case. And this has also been the Mainland's strategy. They have been having sporadic outbreaks in various cities, especially in recent days. The important thing is, under our strategy, we strengthen our capacity to tackle these episodic outbreaks in order to suppress the spread of the variant as soon as possible so that there will not be a massive community outbreak in Hong Kong. We are not, sort of, aiming to absolutely attain zero as a strategy. But the alternative to this type of strategy will be the so-called

"living with the virus" – in other words, we open our borders, we have no social distancing measures, we will, like one country, announce that you don't even have to wear your mask. In my view, Hong Kong does not possess the prerequisites to go for that approach. One is because we still want to open the border, not only with the Mainland but also with the rest of the world; and secondly, our vaccination rate is not yet ideal. The Mainland has attained over 90 per cent. Singapore has attained over 90 per cent. We are still, as far as the first dose is concerned, at 77.5 per cent. Especially when the rate is very low amongst the elderly, and if the elderly get infected, the consequences are very, very serious. I want to add that although many people said that Omicron is not very serious – most of the cases are stable, which is Hong Kong's situation today – Omicron does cause fatalities in other parts of the world. So, we have to be extremely careful, especially those unvaccinated people.

At the moment, we will continue to adopt the strategy that has taken Hong Kong through the last two years. But, in the course of implementing the strategy and individual measures, I and my team will continuously review and improve them and try to make life slightly less difficult for the people of Hong Kong.

Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health: Regarding the infection control requirement of this testing, indeed restriction-testing declaration is not a new measure and we have conducted it in last one or more years. The venue organisers and testing operators have already had a good arrangement and an infection control protocol to follow on. There are several things we need to focus in reducing the risk of infection transmission during the operations. One is to avoid overcrowding and to have an orderly arrangement to test. Second is to conduct the testing in open areas with good ventilation. Third is the individual practice of the swabbers during the operations and they have to wear sufficient PPE (personal protective equipment) with a good practice of infection control. Last but not the least is the hand hygiene and the (wearing of) mask of individual citizens who have undergone testing. During and after the test, citizens should be aware of hand hygiene and use steriliser to disinfect their hands after the test.

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

