

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

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on anti-epidemic measures this morning (April 15). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, and the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the home vaccination programme? The second question is, it was reported that some elderly nursing homes have experienced a second outbreak. What is the Government doing to prevent it from further happening? The last one is on the social distancing relaxation roadmap. After the announcement of the first-phase relaxation, looking forward, what would be the criteria for the second-phase relaxation and what does the timeline look like? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I will address the last question, and then invite the Secretary for the Civil Service to talk about the effectiveness of the home vaccination programme and the Secretary for Food and Health to respond to your comment about the situation in our elderly homes.

We announced yesterday the first-phase relaxation of the social distancing measures, which will take place from April 21. As I said yesterday, we would not be able to please everybody, so some listed premises under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) will still have to be closed during the first phase. Certainly, we will consider allowing them to resume business in the second or third phase. When will we decide and how we will decide, this is not an easy question because we have to closely monitor the epidemic situation, particularly between the announcement and the actual implementation of the social distancing measures. We have this long Easter holiday – we should all remember what happened in the Chinese New Year holiday – we were very alert about the fifth wave and we imposed the very stringent social distancing measures from January 7, well before the Chinese New Year, and we did manage to suppress the first outbreak in that fifth wave; but because of the Chinese New Year and a lot of cross-family interactions, dinners and gatherings, after the Chinese New Year, this wave hit us very hard. We really have to monitor very closely what will happen after the Easter holiday. But let me assure those premises which have yet to have a chance to reopen for business: we will take into account their interest. Their interest is not just the corporation's interest but also to bring Hong Kong back to normalcy and also to secure the jobs for their employees. We will timely review the situation and try our very best to proceed according to what I announced on March 21, that is we have a second phase in a month's time and then a final third phase in another month's time.

Secretary for the Civil Service: As regards the Home Vaccination Service, I think everyone would agree that it is a very time- and labour-intensive operation. We need to do a lot of preparation work. And from the operational experience so far, the outreach healthcare team normally would be able to administer about three to four doses in an hour. So it's really very time- and labour-intensive. But if you look at the necessity of getting particularly the vulnerable groups to get vaccinated, we have already in the past year provided multiple channels and convenient places, to enable persons to get vaccinated, including at present 28 Community Vaccination Centres, 13 hospital vaccination stations in public hospitals, four mobile vaccination units, and more than a thousand private clinics, and also the clinics under the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority. We're also undergoing the outreach vaccination service for residential care homes. For those elderly and persons with disabilities who wish to get vaccinated but who are unable to go to these places no matter how convenient they are, we have to serve them, and that's why we have to do this Home Vaccination Service. And I'm grateful for all the healthcare teams and also all the other organisations and bodies and volunteers to join hands in doing this, including our medical and nursing students from the tertiary institutions who are going to help us in manning the hotline service starting from next Tuesday.

Chief Executive: Secretary for Food and Health.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your question. Obviously, especially in the fifth wave, elderly is our priority group, and our priority setting is the residential homes for the elderly, no doubt about it. I understand that the Social Welfare Department is working very closely with all residential homes for the elderly, together with the Centre for Health Protection and the Hospital Authority to improve the overall situation. So much so, the Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare is chairing a task force to oversee all the different improvement measures at these homes for the elderly. As far as the outbreak is concerned, a very close monitoring is going on. All residents of elderly homes, as well as their staff, are having a daily rapid antigen test. When they tested positive, especially the residents, the residential homes would have to report to the Centre for Health Protection. We are monitoring any outbreak on a daily basis. Second, in terms of the overall situation now, the number of elderly residents in elderly homes tested positive has been going down, but there are still some. Very close monitoring is in place. Infected elderly will be isolated immediately after the isolation order is issued. If the elderly persons' situations require hospitalisation, they will be sent to hospital. If their situations allow them to go to the holding centres, such as the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, they will be sent there as well. They will be effectively isolated. For the Community Geriatric Assessment Team of the Hospital Authority, they are also monitoring these residential homes very closely, and if there is a need for antiviral drugs, they will be given these antiviral drugs immediately. All different parties are working very closely to monitor the overall situation of residential homes for the elderly, in terms of the number of infected cases, the risk of outbreak, as well as the use of drugs,

and also other overall monitoring and caring for the elderly. Of course a number of holding centres and quarantine centres at the AWE (AsiaWorld-Expo), and also in different holding centres would allow the effective isolation and quarantining of the elderly, so that the risk of further outbreak would be reduced. Thank you.

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

