

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 (March 13). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit; and the Acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Jack Chan. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: You just said that 300 000 people are now under home quarantine. Do you have an estimate of the number of people who have not received any support or supply kits yet? And the second question, the Mainland China is struggling to contain its perhaps the biggest COVID outbreak since the pandemic erupted in Wuhan. How would it impact the anti-epidemic work in Hong Kong? And Mainland officials have been urging Hong Kong to strengthen its inter-departmental co-ordination. Do you agree that Hong Kong needs such a Mainland-style joint mechanism like "è¸-é~²è¸-æŽš" in Hong Kong? Thanks.

Chief Executive: About the number of people under home quarantine or home isolation, the figure of 300 000, or over 300 000, was derived from a combination of two figures. One is those who have been issued a home quarantine order. In other words, they are not positive cases. They are the close contacts of infected patients, where in the past they were asked to go into a quarantine facility but, from February 8 the Centre for Health Protection has adjusted its policy because of the large quantities of people concerned. These people have been undergoing home quarantine. I think the figure is about 150 000 but as I explained this figure is likely to be an exaggerated figure because it was calculated on the basis of a 14-day quarantine period. Actually from late February, the Centre for Health Protection has already adjusted its discharge policy to the extent that if a person under home quarantine or home isolation who has taken two jabs – two doses – and obtained a negative RAT (rapid antigen test) result successively for Day 6 and Day 7, he will be regarded as a discharged case. Comparing the "Day 6 and Day 7 requirement" with the 14-day quarantine period, then perhaps there will be a certain number of people who actually are no longer under home quarantine, despite having been issued a home quarantine order of a 14-day duration. The other half will be those infected cases under home isolation but this figure is yet to be very carefully assessed because at the very early stage you will remember that because of the large numbers we may not be able to issue an isolation order to every person under isolation, and many of them have actually recovered.

I don't have a figure on the number of people amongst this huge population that have not received our support, but I would confess that because of the large numbers of people who are in that situation, we might not be able to reach out to everyone. This is just because of a limitation in

the capacity. Although we've been trying very, very hard to make sure that we could provide some service, for example, the service under the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, which is the first point of contact. Once we, or once the OGCIO (Office of the Government Chief Information Officer), gets the list of names of infected persons, they will arrange their logistics company to send the anti-epidemic bag with all those things in it, to each and every of the infected persons and their household members. At the beginning it would be very difficult to catch up. But I think a few days ago, they managed to catch up by distributing 60 000 bags in a day. Of course if today, again, it is a very big volume, then I cannot guarantee that we'll be able to do it within 24 hours as we want. We will certainly try very hard through all the things that you heard this morning – about more designated clinics, more volunteers and more hotlines in order to serve this population of people who need to stay at home.

I send my best wishes to Mainland compatriots because they are now facing clusters of new cases emerging in various provinces and cities. I have every confidence that the Central People's Government, which has so successfully combatted the COVID-19 epidemic in the last two years, will be able to rise to the challenge and also suppress this wave. At the moment, it has no impact whatsoever on Hong Kong's anti-epidemic work. It also has no impact whatsoever on the supply of materials and assistance to Hong Kong. The only impact, I suppose, is that Professor Liang Wannian (Head of the National Health Commission's COVID-19 leading task force) has gone back to Beijing instead of continuing his stay with us. He has given us a lot of good advice and other members of the Mainland expert group are still with us to give us advice, to look at how we combat the epidemic, but Professor Liang left yesterday. Other than that I think we will continue to have the needed support from the Central Government.

With the wave of this magnitude, of course we could do better. We are doing better every day and we are not complacent, we would try to improve every aspect of our anti-epidemic work. I would say that, if people ask me whether we have a mechanism to join up the Government to fight the epidemic, we have. We have it from Day 1, and that mechanism is clearly laid down in internal guidelines and published after SARS. It is a three-tier response level, and we have not suspended this highest emergency response level, with a very strong inter-departmental mechanism for the last two years and two months. That's why I could say that we have 121 meetings held and every day I am in command of this inter-departmental effort in order to join up every aspect of the government establishment to fight this epidemic. I appeal to the people of Hong Kong to continue to support us and to comply with the various anti-epidemic measures as applied to you as a citizen of Hong Kong, and together we'll be able to come out of this fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic.

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

