

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

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on anti-epidemic measures this morning (March 9). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong; and the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: Good morning. For the universal testing, as the schools are closed to facilitate the universal testing, is it unfair for them to lose the opportunity to go to school? Are the schools closed for nothing? And also, for the QEH (Queen Elizabeth Hospital) conversion, will other public hospitals be converted to designated hospitals for COVID patients? For the daily figure, what's the daily figure for confirmed cases today? Has the cases figure peaked because of the launch of the RAT (Rapid Antigen Test) registration platform? If this is the case, what's the assessment from the Hong Kong Government? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I'll answer the first question and invite Dr Ko to respond to your second question. As far as your third question is concerned, I don't have the answer because the first duty of the Centre for Health Protection is to provide the figures to the public at the 4.30pm press conference. I normally do not have the figures in advance. I'm sure that they are still collating, analysing, putting together the figures to ensure accuracy, especially now we have self-declarations for RAT-positive cases. So you will have to wait for another four and a half hours to get today's figures from the 4.30pm press conference.

About the first question, the interests of children have been put very high on our priority in tackling the COVID-19 epidemic. On this occasion, we are not denying or depriving students of their learning opportunities. What we have done is we have advanced the summer holidays, so instead of having summer holidays in July and August, they will shortly have their summer holidays now. I think some already started to have their summer holidays from March 7, that is two days ago, and by next week, all secondary, primary schools and kindergartens will have their summer holidays, so that after the Easter break, hopefully around April 20, we will be able to combat this fifth wave and then kids could go back to school with face-to-face learning. Previously, we just suspended face-to-face learning and replaced it by online learning regardless of the duration. But this time, exactly because we want to preserve the opportunities of students to learn in a face-to-face environment, we have adjusted the school calendar. In so doing, we have also respected the uniqueness of international schools. International schools will continue with their school calendar because of their special arrangements with expatriate teachers and parents during summer and so on.

I invite Tony to talk about plans for other hospitals, if any.

Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority: Thank you, Chief Executive. We are worried that we are having an increasing number of COVID patients, and the number of patients affected in the fifth wave far exceeds all we have in the past. That's why we have an imminent need to increase our capacity and the capability to take care of such patients. Two major actions are in the pipeline. For the first one, we are converting more of our wards into dedicated wards that can accept COVID patients. Our target is to aim at converting about 50 per cent of all our inpatients at general hospitals' beds to be able to accommodate COVID patients. The other major initiative is to arrange some hospitals to be designated hospitals. As most are already aware, we have earlier converted Tin Shui Wai Hospital as well as North Lantau Hospital into dedicated COVID patient hospitals with a total capacity of 460 beds. And from today onwards, we will also proceed to convert Queen Elizabeth Hospital into a designated hospital to look after COVID patients. The aim of doing so is that we hope by concentrating the COVID patients together, concentrating the expertise, the resources and the management of such patients, we will be able to provide better clinical outcomes for the COVID patients. So, in the coming few days, we are going to transfer the non-COVID patients that are currently in Queen Elizabeth Hospital to the different hospitals within the Kowloon Central Cluster, as well as to other hospital clusters, and private hospitals as well. We estimated that around 380 patients will be transferred in the coming few days. At the same time, to facilitate Queen Elizabeth Hospital of the capability for taking up more COVID patients, we will, starting from today, divert some of the ambulances that are with those still who are not that critical to other Accident and Emergency Departments. We hope that we will be able to complete this whole operation by around the March 13, that is this Sunday, so that Queen Elizabeth Hospital will be able to function as the designated hospital to receive the COVID patients. We are, at the same time, closely monitoring the development of the epidemic, the number of patients, and the severity. So in the pipeline, we are also planning other hospitals to serve similar functions. Some of which included hospitals at different clusters, like Ruttonjee Hospital, Haven of Hope Hospital, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Fung Yiu King Hospital, and also Kowloon Hospital. Of course, we will closely monitor the situation, and dynamically mobilise our recourses to cope with the increasing service demand.

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