

Transcript of remarks of press conference on “Early Vaccination for All” campaign (with photos/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (May 31) on the launch of the "Early Vaccination for All" campaign by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit; and member of the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines Dr Thomas Tsang. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Good afternoon. Several English questions. First on civil servants. Mr Nip, do you think, are the two extra days off really enough to motivate civil servants to get jabs? If this doesn't work, what's the next step to boost vaccination among government workers? And ultimately would making it kind of mandatory be an option, for example, making it mandatory for people to be vaccinated in order for them to enter the government headquarters, for example, would that be an option in the end?

Second question to Mrs Lam. Is reaching the vaccination rate of at least 70 per cent your target before September? And what's your appeal to the private sector, will you appeal to the private sector to hand out more flats, hand out theme park tickets? Because according to your slogan, you're advertising that this is more than just a jab, but listening to appeals or initiatives from the Government, citizens might not be really motivated by this drive as of yet, so what's your appeal to the private sector? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Patrick.

Secretary for the Civil Service: I am sure that this new initiative of granting one day of vaccination leave in the form of authorised absence per dose would be helpful to colleagues, to government employees because it would facilitate them and enable them to have sufficient rest to recover from vaccination should there be any side effects. As you can see, we have adopted a progressive approach to facilitate colleagues to get vaccinated. We will continue to monitor the situation and promote vaccination within the civil service.

Chief Executive: As far as the second question, when we chose this slogan – "It's more than a jab", it has two meanings. One is, it's more than a jab for you to protect yourself and to protect your family members, which has been a slogan we have adopted for the past three months. It's more than a jab because this is the lifeline of Hong Kong. It will make Hong Kong capable of going out of this COVID-19 epidemic if we have a high vaccination rate. We'll have a sufficient level of herd immunity, then business could go back to

normal and travel could resume with the Mainland and other parts of the world. I hope members of the public will realise that it's not just taking two doses of vaccine. You are making a huge contribution to Hong Kong society. "It's more than a jab" in a very ordinary sense that apart from receiving the dose, you may have a chance of getting something back, whether it is an extra holiday provided by the employer, whether it is a lucky draw with certain goodies and things like that or discount coupons in shopping malls or free tickets to the theme park and so on. This is a very tangible way in order to overcome what we call "the vaccine hesitancy". I wish to think that people are not resisting vaccination because we have been growing up with vaccination. Kids have to be fully vaccinated before the age of six. But there is a degree of hesitancy to wait and see whether there is something that will happen and so on. In order to overcome that hesitancy and to invite people to spend an hour to make a booking on the website and then come forward to the CVC (Community Vaccination Centre) to receive the jab, we are giving you some more incentives, so to speak. This is what we mean.

In terms of my appeal to the private sector, as I just mentioned in my opening remarks, I have signed off over 100 letters this morning to developers, owners of shopping centres, chambers of commerce and retail sector as well as the clansman associations to appeal to them to offer whatever they feel comfortable, or they are capable of doing. It is not for me to dictate what they should do but I said and I told them in my letter that I'm gratified to see that some enterprises and organisations have already taken that initiative to implement measures in respect of their employees, their customers or just members of the public. These initiatives seem to have some positive results. Although it's a very short period of a couple of days, we have seen some positive results. I believe that this is a time for concerted efforts in order to achieve the objective of mass vaccination within a short period of time. When that mass vaccination is achieved, there will be a robust immunity defence being built up in Hong Kong, then businesses and everyone in the community will benefit ultimately, and Hong Kong can press ahead with revival of the economy.

These are the appeals to the private sector. I am sure that after this press conference, individual corporations and enterprises will have something to say to echo the Government's campaign drive. It is also for all of us, including our media friends, to help promote and join hands in this campaign, so that hopefully by the end of three months we could reach a comfortable level of vaccination rate that will enable us to do what we want to do in returning to normality. Thank you.

Reporter: In the event of another wave of COVID-19 infection, unvaccinated people may be barred from entering some premises and may be under stricter entry rules. It is unfair for some people such as pregnant women and those who have a medical condition. Do you think that unvaccinated people may take it as a punishment? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Well, in all the things that we have been doing so far that require vaccination, there is always an escape clause, that is, people who are medically not fit for taking the jab and so on. You need not be worried

that it will be applied to the extent that people who are not medically fit will still be required to take a job in order to do something which is very essential to their daily living, for example going to school. When you mention this word about "fair", I hope people who have yet to take the job will also realise that we need them to participate in order to be fair to all those who have taken the job hitherto, so that all of us, together, could reach a higher level of vaccination rate that will keep the city safe. This is what we are going to achieve and we want to achieve under this "Early Vaccination for All" campaign.

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

