

Transcript of remarks of press conference (with photo/video)

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, held a press conference in the afternoon of February 7. Also joining were the Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC; the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah; the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joshua Law; the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; and the Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food), Mr Daniel Cheng. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Just a few English questions first. First question regarding the quarantine measures. Are there any other measures other than spot checks and the possible legal consequences to make sure that people really are staying at home or staying in the hotels they're booked in? How should people behave when they are being quarantined in these places? And isn't that subjecting other people in the building or other hotel stayers to possible risk or higher risk even? Second question, regarding the people coming into Hong Kong these few days, I'm sure the officials are aware that Mainland visitors entering Hong Kong, particularly through Shenzhen Bay Port, have significantly increased since this mandatory quarantine is announced. With this buffer between the announcement and the actual implementation, have the Hong Kong Government actually already let a lot of potential cases, as some haven't shown symptoms yet, into Hong Kong? And has that increased the risk for the city and adding pressure for our medical system? Third area, regarding the Chief Secretary's appeal to current and retired government workers to volunteer to help with quarantine efforts, some union leaders are saying that some government workers are being strong-armed or pressured into volunteering to take part, even though they're scared that they might be infected. So what's your response to that? Would there be any follow-up? And has this appeal actually come too late since the measure, like, the quarantine, is coming tomorrow, basically?

Chief Secretary for Administration: Let me deal with the third question because you specifically mentioned my name, and I will also answer in general terms the first question about quarantine and leave it to the experts, Professor Chan and also Secretary for Security, to deal with the second question. My appeal to civil servants is a sincere one. It's genuine. We are facing really challenging times and we are talking about social cohesion. It's time for solidarity. I think everybody in the civil service, everyone in the community, should exercise civic responsibility – it's time for us to stand together. Together we stand, divided we fall, right? So we must work hand in hand to tackle this crisis situation, the virus. I'm really making a personal, sincere appeal. I'm telling you that some heads of departments are responding in very positive terms already. I'm receiving very encouraging emails. So any suggestion of coercion is entirely untrue. On the other hand,

it's really persuasion, appeal. I'm sure that a number of civil servants will respond to my appeal. So I just want to put the record straight: no question of coercion. It's on a voluntary basis. As the name implies, volunteer.

The first question relates to quarantine. Now let me make an appeal here. The 14-day home quarantine we talked about, basically, the tier two, so-called the tier two quarantine, because these people are not carriers at all. They don't display any symptoms at all. First of all, they are not close contacts, all right? And also they are under close surveillance, close liaison with the Department of Health, the experts there every day – temperature checking and also make sure they wear a mask and all that. What they do is just to stay home. You know, if they've got any needs at all, they've got volunteers to help them. In fact, the Social Welfare Department and Home Affairs Department will stand ready to help them – anything that we can do for them, even childcare, all right? Even buying necessities, buying lunch, dinner, breakfast. And also there will be a hotline provided by Home Affairs Department, I will invite SHA (Secretary for Home Affairs) to supplement. But let me first hand the question to Professor Chan, all right? Then followed by Kong-wah, the SHA.

Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, regarding the objective of this mandatory quarantine, their legal backing is to reduce the cross boundary people flow, as well as to reduce the transmissibility of the virus within the community. The mandatory quarantine for 14 days, as the Chief Secretary alluded to earlier, there are checking and also medical surveillance as well as looking into the condition of the people at home. The whole idea is for this person to stay at home and not to go out. So that in case they carry any virus, it would not be transmitted to the rest of the community. That is the whole idea.

Other than the information packs of health education and also telephone calls to the clients, there will be spot checks and random checks to see whether this person is at home. Of course the condition of these persons, for example, whether they have recorded high temperatures, whether they have any clinical symptoms, would be also checked and recorded by themselves.

There will be periodic checking by the Department of Health colleagues to monitor the situation. Of course, self discipline is the most important because the whole idea is not to put the person at home, and then having a lot of guards outside. It is not for this. Self discipline and having everybody in Hong Kong together fighting this infectious disease is the most important.

Chief Secretary for Administration: It all boils down to civic responsibility here. Can I also invite Mr Lau, SHA, to talk a little about the support? Because the Social Welfare Department and also Home Affairs Department underpin the whole exercise as volunteers.

Secretary for Home Affairs: We'll set up 37 hotlines to deal with those enquiries by the people under home quarantine. They will be running 24 hours by the staff of the HAD.

Reporter: My question about Shenzhen Bay entry?

Chief Secretary for Administration: Yes, I will hand the question to John, S for S.

Secretary for Security: Since the Government introduced measures starting on January 30 to suspend the service of six control points and thereafter on February 4, another four control points, we can see the arrival figures have been dropping. On February 5, i.e. the day before yesterday, the total number of people arriving in Hong Kong was 58 800 roughly, that is a drop of 75 per cent compared with the figure before the introduction of the measures. For Hong Kong people arriving, the figure is a drop of 77 per cent; for Mainland visitors, a drop of 68 per cent; for other visitors, a drop of 50 per cent. Yesterday was the single day we saw an increase in the number of arrivals since the introduction of the measures. It is not unexpected because tomorrow we will be implementing the mandatory quarantine for 14 days and it is understandable (that) there are a lot people who either left Hong Kong or left Mainland to come back to Hong Kong or they travel across to sort out some of the businesses for their own arrangement. The key really is on risk management in regard to all these human movements across the border. By introducing the 14-day mandatory quarantine measure, we will be stopping a lot of people, so either today or yesterday, there would be people who would be making arrangements for themselves so as to arrange themselves daily routines to fit into the new arrangement. The question is the frequency will be severely stopped as a result of the measure. So the frequency of travel is the key factor in regard to risk management.

Reporter: So first of all I would like to ask that regarding we're expecting a large amount of people that would require quarantine, has the Government actually identified new locations for quarantine apart from the three holiday camps, which could only provide 97 units? And you mentioned that for people who do not have residence in Hong Kong, they would, maybe, be quarantined in hotels. But what if hotels were filled, those people would be quarantined there, and if those hotel staff, do they have a duty or obligation to monitor those people in quarantine? And also I would like to follow up a question previously asked by a Chinese-speaking colleague saying that the advice from Professor Gabriel Leung saying that hotels are actually not suitable for quarantine because the ventilation system might allow the virus to be spread through the entire building even the new people they might ...(inaudible) Why does the Government still choose hotels as one of the quarantine sites? Thank you.

Chief Secretary for Administration: Let me deal with the first question first. The people ordered to go into home quarantine, basically they are low risk – so-called tier two, all right? Tier two. They are not close contacts of confirmed cases. They do not display any symptoms at all, and also are under close surveillance and also close contact with the Department of Health and so on. So they are under regular surveillance all the time. All we have talked about is really for them to spend 14 days on their own, all right? In isolation as it were with full support rendered to them and their families as

well, so we are talking about a special category of people under quarantine. Now as far as venues are concerned, the centres are concerned, we're talking about home quarantine, the problem is solved. Basically we're talking about staying home, all right? They've got their room, their place to live, to operate. For those without accommodation, we've got to provide them with accommodation. The challenge therefore is to find enough and suitable venues. That's why we're now doing our best. We're doing our best, searching the right sites. That's why we call on the community, citizens of Hong Kong exercise our civic responsibility. Time for solidarity, time for understanding, time for social cohesion particularly, as I always stress, it's social cohesion, time for us to stand together to face the crisis, all right? So, is there anything you want to supplement?

Secretary for Food and Health: Perhaps I can invite the Director of Health to talk more about the places whereby we think whether it is suitable or not for quarantine. As I said earlier about different levels of risk, for example we now placed the close contacts of the confirmed cases in quarantine camps. They are of the highest risk because they are the close contacts of confirmed cases. We also have a quarantine category for people who come from Hubei. Now we are talking about people who are coming from any parts of China in the last 14 days. The risk level is different based on the assessment of the Department of Health.

Director of Health: Under the existing legislation, there are two types of order, namely the isolation order, and the second one is the quarantine order. Isolation applies to patient, infected persons. If there is a case who is highly suspected to be infected by this novel coronavirus and also for confirmed cases, they will be managed in a hospital under isolation. Once confirmed, they will be held there and kept there until they are fully recovered. That's for isolation. As for quarantine, there are several types of situation when quarantine order will be issued. In the past, we considered the close contact of confirmed cases. For close contact, I mean, for example, household family; if travelling on an airplane, the passengers sitting within a radius of two seats of the confirmed cases. These close contact, so defined, will be put in quarantine centres. The familiar one which you will know will be like Lady MacLehose Holiday Village. So those are the close contacts of confirmed cases. With the passing of the new emergency regulation, which takes effect tonight, it applies to anyone who has ever been to the Mainland in the past 14 days. So they do not fulfill the criteria of having been a close contact of a confirmed case. They are simply anyone who has ever been to the Mainland in the past 14 days. Because of the fact that we want to achieve two purposes, namely, reduce cross-boundary movement of people and secondly, ask those who have been to the Mainland to stay at home. In the past, we advised people to stay at home for 14 days if they have ever been to the Mainland. But with the recent appearance of more local cases, we think it is important and essential for these people to be applied a more stringent measure. By that, instead of just advising them to stay at home, we mandate them to stay at home. These people are relatively low risk and that is why we adopt a different level of quarantine having done the risk assessment.

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

