

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

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (December 23). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Stanley Ho Professor of Respiratory Medicine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Professor David Hui; the Chairman of the Elderly Commission, Dr Lam Ching-choi; the Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Mr Thomas Chan and the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: First, about the public having a choice over what vaccine they get. Chief Executive, according to what you said, you did say in your own words that this is not, well, market behaviour and people can't really choose which type of vaccine they get and there shouldn't be any choice. So why the backtrack now and when the time comes will there only be one type of vaccine available on the market and in the end people will still be unable to kind of choose what vaccine they want to get? And second question in regard to the fund and to provide financial support to people who might be unfortunately affected by the severe side effects like, what kind of people will be eligible to apply for financial help under this fund? Would it be, like, those really rare circumstances, really rare side effects, then they will be eligible, or whatever impact there will be, under whatever impact they will be having under the vaccination, they'll still be able to get some sort of financial help under the fund? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I cannot answer the second question if it concerns the clinical aspects of what constitutes serious adverse reactions arising from the vaccination. This has to be done by the clinicians under the drug monitoring or surveillance system to be established by the Secretary for Food and Health under the regulation made this morning. As far as details of the fund, whether there will be other prerequisites or criteria before individuals being affected will be eligible, this will be deliberated and discussed and then presented to the Finance Committee. But based on previous experience, for example on the Aids Trust Fund and other similar schemes, one would focus on the effects that this individual has been affected by the drug, by the diseases, by the virus, rather than to look into other circumstances before deciding on offering assistance to the individual. But this is only an illustration. I will suggest that you have to wait for us to present the details about this indemnity fund later on.

Coming back to the question of choice of vaccine, this vaccination will still be a non-market behaviour. It is still a government vaccination programme because it is going to be authorised for use under emergency situation, as provided for in the regulation made today. The so-called specified purposes basically will be referring to the government vaccination programme. In other words, what I said on the last occasion is it will not be

readily available in the market for an individual or clinician to buy and then to administer, which would then give the widest choice – if all the vaccines are available in the market then everybody could choose what vaccine to use. It remains what I said last time, as a government vaccination programme, especially we are making ourselves responsible for the authorisation of a vaccine for emergency use.

What I have elaborated this afternoon, not deviating from what I said on the last occasion, is we would be giving individuals the choice in terms of the timing of receiving the vaccination, and also the site – where does this individual want to get the vaccination – and by that there will be choices because we now have procured three different vaccines. I imagine that once we have rolled out the programme, a particular vaccine will be administered in a particular site, for example a community vaccination centre versus a private doctor's clinic versus a hospital setting versus an elderly care home. If the individual is able to choose, I don't want to go to the vaccination centre, I prefer to go to a private doctor because the private doctor's site will use a particular vaccine, then the choice is there. But I don't see how we could offer different types of vaccine in one site. That would be extremely confusing, especially each of the three vaccines we have bought require two doses, so we have to manage the quantity to make sure that if you choose this, we will have a second dose available and ready for you to use. It has to be done in that way. There will be choices, but I will say that it has to be exercised in accordance with the government-administered vaccination programme. I hope that clears up the confusion or worries.

Reporter: Hi, Mrs Lam. So my first question on vaccination. Is the Government going to set any target, such as when to reach the 70 per cent herd immunity? And when you mentioned residents can choose the vaccines, what will the Government do if a large number of residents refuse to inject a certain type of vaccine? Will it delay your plan to reach such immunity? And about the joint meeting held in Shenzhen yesterday, it was understood that the Mainland is highly concerned about whether Hong Kong is able to reach zero infections, while some heavyweight representatives in pro-establishment camp, such as Tam Yiu-chung, also sent a letter directly to the Central Government seeking help. Do you think Beijing and your allies are unhappy with your current approach? What are your stance currently on universal testing and how far are we now from reaching such zero infections? At which point will Government consider reopening the border? Thank you.

Chief Executive: There are quite a number of questions there. First of all, we have now purchased enough vaccines to serve the whole of the Hong Kong population. We will continue to find a fourth technology, so that we can 100 per cent meet our Scientific Committee's recommendations in ensuring that Hong Kong people will get adequate coverage. At the end of the day, it's a question of public education, which will of course be based on objective scientific data and explanation, that when one looks at the vaccine, it's the safety, it's the efficacy, it's the quality. It's not a particular place. It's not a particular sentiment of where you want that vaccine to come from. I hope that the media will help us to disseminate this accurate information in approaching the subject of vaccination. Please do not try – I'm not

suggesting that you are doing that – but let's don't try to politicise what is a scientific issue for the good of Hong Kong. We will continue to do the public education. One of the first things that Patrick Nip has to do is to step up the education through various media and we will continue to do so.

It is very difficult to set a target. If you ask me, the target is everybody. We want everybody to be vaccinated so that it's not only protecting your oneself, it's protecting your family members, it's also protecting Hong Kong society at large. At the moment, it's very difficult for us to set a target.

About the meeting that took place yesterday. I could tell you that this was another measure of support for the Hong Kong SAR Government in combating COVID-19 from the Central People's Government. Earlier on, the Central People's Government, upon my request, has assisted us in the Universal Community Testing Programme by sending us 580 technicians to undertake that massive exercise. They have helped us to renovate the AsiaWorld-Expo to provide more isolation and community facilities for the Hospital Authority. Right now they are steaming ahead to complete the construction of the interim hospital next to the AsiaWorld-Expo. They have also undertaken upon my request during my Beijing trip that, if the circumstances so require that we need a vaccine supply that is either developed or produced in the Mainland to serve the Hong Kong population, then the Central Government is happy to give us a certain supply.

Yesterday's meeting was the continuation of that strong degree of support from the Central People's Government, that for the experts on both sides, officials from both sides, to have a good exchange of each other's strategy, measures and so on. If you said that the Central Government is concerned, of course they are concerned. I am concerned. All of us sitting here are very concerned. I want to have the cases down to zero as soon as possible. But this requires the concerted efforts of everybody in society. Just over the last fortnight, I'm sure you have reported on cases which you do not feel are responsible. They should never have happened – runaways from hospital, going out for parties and having these illegal upstairs bars in Hong Kong. Everybody has to share part of the responsibility and part of the pain in order to get Hong Kong out of the epidemic situation. The Government has the biggest role to play and we are doing that, but I would appeal to members of society to help us, especially in the coming holidays, to stay at home as far as possible, to avoid meeting with even relatives for family parties because of the serious situation.

The joint meeting is not to give us instructions. I can guarantee you that that was not the purpose of the joint meeting. It was a joint meeting to express support and also to exchange views on how each side could help each other better and so on. Of course, I have said in my Policy Address that I will strive – we will strive – to achieve zero infections and we are doing that right now. To achieve zero infections requires a strategy. If you remember, one of the experts said publicly that he did not feel that Hong Kong's strategy in fighting the epidemic was wrong, but he did comment that perhaps in the execution we could be more refined, we could be more careful,

more meticulous, and I agree that. There have been incidents where members of the community have to wait for a few days before being admitted into a quarantine centre, and members of the society have to wait before they get an SMS about the negative test. These are all the things we could improve, and I can say that every day we are identifying the necessity to improve our operation in order to bring Hong Kong out of the current wave of COVID-19 as soon as possible. Thank you.

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

