

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

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (June 21). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food), Miss Vivian Lau; and the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Ronald Lam. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: When you are talking about testing the antibody for incoming tourists who are vaccinated, what kind of measures can hotels provide for tourists so that they can have the flexibility in arranging the hotels' bookings? And HKU study actually found that the antibody tests may fail to pick up some small amount of antibodies generated by the Sinovac jab. So do authorities have this threshold of amount of antibodies that travellers have to have in order to qualify for this shorter quarantine? Second question, we can see that some relaxation is happening to certain establishment without added requirements, for example the vaccination requirement. Would that send out a wrong message to the public, basically saying that the easing of social distancing measures may come as long as people wait long enough and they may not have to be vaccinated? Third question, can you explain the rationale that a group of four people can attend a wedding, or event celebrating the handover without any problems, but once they head out to the street, they may be found to be violating the social gathering ban of four people and more? And does this discrepancy kind of happen because authorities do not want protest to happen, because protestors can still wear mask and protest organisers can also help to make sure that infection control measures have been carried out? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, based on what we were advised by the joint scientific group earlier this month, we are now introducing an arrangement which will provide more convenience for travellers to resume coming to Hong Kong. It works on the basis of antibody tests, which I understand is quite unusual up till now all over the world, but our experts have given this view, and antibody test does confirm that the vaccine has had its effect. What we will be doing is for arrivals into Hong Kong, if that particular passenger is willing to take an antibody test and the antibody test is positive, which means that he or she has antibodies, then the mandatory quarantine period at the designated hotel could be reduced from 14 days to seven days. I believe this will be much welcomed by a lot of business travellers coming to Hong Kong.

Your specific question is how hotels could facilitate this sort of arrangement. According to the joint scientific group's advice, they would rather prefer the antibody test to be taken in Hong Kong, whereas sometimes for the COVID-19 test, we could accept pre-boarding certification although

now it's also test and hold at Hong Kong International Airport. In order for that fully vaccinated passenger to take an antibody test in Hong Kong, inevitably he or she will have to stay in a hotel for a while, while waiting for the antibody test. That would mean that that passenger has to book on the basis of a longer period of quarantine, say 14 days. If he or she is being advised, maybe on the second day or the third day, that the antibody test is positive, he or she could actually leave the designated hotel a week earlier, then I would very much appeal to the Hong Kong hotels that they should allow that flexibility for the passengers instead of charging them for the full 14 days. I have already asked the Tourism Commissioner to start these negotiations with the hotel sector. At the end of the day, we want Hong Kong to become, again, a very welcoming place. Why do hotels want to make life difficult for our visitors, travellers and business people by asking for the seven-day charge instead of helping the Government to facilitate implementation of this measure? I'm pretty optimistic that we should be able to work out that facilitation arrangement.

What will be the threshold for the antibody is not for me to answer. This is a scientific question. But it happens that I have gone through an antibody test – and I'm positive – I did raise that question with my doctor and I was given a figure – and I took Sinovac, as you know – and I was told that it would be very, very adequate. It's not a very mechanical exercise that you have to reach a certain number, as far as I was told by my doctor who is a professor at the Hong Kong University. He said that this will be far more adequate than you need, actually. I can only tell you that if you want more scientific response, I will have to ask my experts to give you an advice later on.

The third question, I think you are right in that observation, but having been through this COVID-19 for 18 months, and the fourth wave has lasted for half a year, people are urging for more social activities, businesses are crying for more business turnover. If we rigidly stick to, "No, now the first objective is to push for vaccine, so everything could only happen when you are fully vaccinated," I think that is not being very responsive or very compassionate to the sentiment. I still appeal and we will still facilitate the taking of vaccine by people who want to take it, but the time has come for us to allow a higher level of business and social activities without being made subject to vaccination. But of course as you will notice that if the business and the participants are willing to take the vaccine, the relaxation will be much higher. It's 50 per cent to 100 per cent of the capacity, so I hope that is still a good enough incentive to appeal and encourage people to take the vaccine.

The final question is about Cap. 599G. We are not discriminating or penalising a particular type of activity. After all, Hong Kong is a very free society and the freedom of expression, freedom of protest are being honoured under the Basic Law. But we are dealing with a public health pandemic that is still hitting the world. In dealing with public health, of course the first factor we need to consider is the infection risks, or what is the inherent infection risk in a particular type of gathering. The second we have to take into account is the ability to manage the risk. If we ask people to wear a

mask, to take a temperature, now to check whether you have a vaccination record and so on, you need somebody who has that capability to assure us that yes, that venue or that event organiser is capable of fulfilling that requirement. Basically, what we are now proposing is venue-based relaxation. It has to take place in a venue. It is within a confined area that more relaxed measures will be applied. It is certainly not to prohibit a certain activity which has nothing to do with public health. Everything is based on public health having balanced the factors that I have referred to.

Thank you.

Reporter: The quarantine relaxation for antibody tests. It's great for business people, but for families with children, it doesn't really help because those coming in with children under 12 or infants will still have to do three weeks. Obviously there's scientific reasons not to let them out into the wild but what's the administration's latest thinking on this issue, and do you have any thoughts on that?

Chief Executive: This is one of the fine details that we have to examine and come to a position. That's why I said that we are not yet able to announce a firm date for the implementation of this new arrangement of bringing down the quarantine period to seven days for those who have been fully vaccinated and who are willing to take the antibody test. Thank you for raising this. If the arrival is a family and has, within the family, either a young child who could not be vaccinated or somebody – an elderly person who is medically unfit – then how are we going to deal with that family situation? We will study that and come up with a response.

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

