

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

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (January 31). Also joining were the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau; the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip; the Director of Immigration, Mr Tsang Kwok-wai; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; and the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Mrs Lam, I'm sure you know that there is a vote tomorrow from some employees, hospital unions, talking about going on strike possibly if you didn't close the border, sounds like you are not willing to do that. Are you willing to take that risk of thousands of employees going on strike as a result of sort of this emergency situation? Secondly, with the new sort of surveillance measures for Hubei visitors, would these measures have stopped visitors, for example, from jumping from hospital to hospital without authorities being able to do anything to force them to seek medical care? And thirdly, on face masks, I'm sure that Mr Yau, you have already sort of covered this but is this something where the Government could be taking more a centralised role in terms of distribution and also controlling prices so that we don't see sort of price gouging and long lines around the neighborhoods waiting for face masks?

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. I will answer the first question and then invite the Director of Health to talk about the medical surveillance and Mr Yau to comment on the question of pricing and distribution of surgical masks. I sincerely hope and appeal to our health staff in the Hospital Authority to consider very seriously any plan to have a strike because at the end of the day, those who suffer will be the patients as well as Hong Kong's healthcare system. I said repeatedly that we treasure the contribution of our health staff throughout the years – it's not just about this particular virus incident. I have been working very closely with Hong Kong's medical staff throughout my public service career in my capacity as Assistant Director in the Health Department, as a member of the Hospital Authority Board, as the Director of Social Welfare. I have very high regard of the medical staff, medical nursing and allied health and also supporting staff in the public system, whether in the Department of Health or the Hospital Authority. I have no doubt that they have the best interests of Hong Kong people, as well as Hong Kong, in terms of our healthcare system, which is highly credible, professional, as well as Hong Kong's overall interest. The Government has already taken a series of measures and they are effective measures as I have proven to you with some of the passenger statistics to significantly bring down the number of arrivals of visitors from the Mainland and other places so as to reduce the chance of infection and also to lessen the workload on the public hospitals.

I have also pledged and have been working with the Secretary for Food and Health and the Hospital Authority to provide whatever assistance our health staff need, whether in terms of financial resources, in terms of supplies. I've been putting them on the first priority of the access to a very limited supply of protective equipment as well as masks despite there have been aspirations for us to share some of this limited supply with the community. I hope very much that they will also take into account these efforts made and seriously consider their plan. I really don't think a complete closure of the border control points is the right answer to the situation that we are facing. It is at least not in line with the very scientific-based and knowledge-based advice given to us as recently as early this morning by the World Health Organization and its panel of experts. We should not contemplate restrictions of international travel or trade and we should not adopt a discriminatory approach in dealing with people flowing between different countries and places in trying to contain the spread of the disease. There are other measures which will help us to achieve that effect.

Director of Health: Under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance, this new novel coronavirus infection is one of the notifiable diseases. So when the doctors suspect a person who fulfils the criteria of referring to us, the patient will be sent to a public hospital for investigation and under isolation. And under the law we will place an isolation order on this infected person. When the case is confirmed we will conduct epidemiological investigation and identify the patient's close contact. And for the close contact we will impose a quarantine order and direct the close contact to be kept in the quarantine centre. So under either the isolation order or the quarantine order, this person is obliged to be kept in the place where he or she is directed to stay. And if he breaches it, it constitutes an offence.

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: On the question of protective materials, including masks, the Government has been trying to help in a number of ways. We are taking a three-pronged approach. In recognition of the shortage (of masks), which is not just local but global, we try to cast the net wider. The Government, as the major user, has to procure such materials for our frontline medical staff. We have been casting the net on a global basis, hoping that we can secure a longer term (of supply) and in greater quantity.

In addition, we are also working with the retail and wholesale sectors, which are also in great demand for such materials. We talked to them and identified that there might be certain problems that they encountered, including custom clearances on some of these materials coming over from the Mainland. We have established channels to talk to the Mainland authorities, between customs authorities, to make sure that orders which have been placed are able to be delivered on time and in full. So through this process, we have been helping both procurement of government departments and procurement from the private sector. The third element is that, in recognition of this strong demand, there are also companies approaching us to see if we can help them in bringing back production lines (of protective materials to Hong Kong). We are lining up government departments to work (on this) together.

In addition to all these, there are also people and companies who would like to donate certain (number of) masks to those in need. We helped them to channel these to charity groups or people in need. These are what we have been doing in the past couple of weeks.

You mentioned about price control, I think we will leave no stone unturned (to address the issue) as the Chief Secretary (for Administration) mentioned yesterday. But in considering whichever ways to tackle the problem, we must find a way which is effective in ensuring supply. On price, if there are malpractices, (like) stocking up or whatever, this is a job for the Consumer Council (to deal with), and they have given advice. Customs (Customs and Excise Department) has also taken enforcement actions in the last few days by enforcing the Trade Descriptions Ordinance. These malpractices were brought before the law. But I think what we need to do at the moment is to try to enhance the global supply, to make sure that the orders we have placed will have a prompt delivery, and also to ensure that there will be a good distribution system. In this regard, we are talking to both the trade and within the (government) departments. At the same time, we also encourage the community to find various ways of sharing, like the gifts we have received and channelled to those in need. Thank you.

Reporter: I've got three questions. First, for Mrs Lam. You said that we shouldn't be discriminating against certain types of people, right? The Mainlanders. But the Labour Department yesterday issued a statement that FDHs, foreign domestic workers, he requests them to stay at home even on their days off and the foreign domestic workers feel that this is discriminatory because they have only one day off where they could, you know, do so many things and gather but in open-air areas as you know. They've done that during SARS, where I think just two Filipino or Indonesians were infected by SARS because they went to a grocery store, you know, at the early stage of the outbreak. That's one. Number two is, can you explain more about the electronic tracking device and GPS, that I think it was Professor Chan who said that you're planning to do, to track those people who are confirmed or suspected or should be brought into the quarantine because they came from Hubei Province, if I get it right? Number three is do we know much more about the coronavirus? Maybe Professor Chan or Dr Chan, Constance Chan, can tell us, because you said, I mean, breaking news now that there are two confirmed cases in the UK, so it is spreading, right, globally, and Hong Kong and Macao is lumped in China among the figures in China because you're SAR. So, what I'd like to ask you is do we know much? There are so many unknowns. Is it a full range of, you know, symptoms? Is it mild? Are you contagious when you don't have symptoms or when you develop fever or some other symptoms? So I just wanted to ask.

Chief Executive: I'll answer the first question and then leave Professor Chan and Dr Chan to address the latter two questions. First of all, let me just quote for you what is in the World Health Organization statement. It makes it very clear that the countries and governments are cautioned against actions that promote stigma or discrimination in line with the principles of article 3 of the International Health Regulations. This approach that we should not

stigmatise or discriminate is well enshrined in an international health regulation, which means that it has very good basis from the protection of public health perspective and also the balancing, taking into account other considerations.

I just heard what you told me about the Labour Department's advice. I have not seen it myself. But I suppose that advice was given really to protect our foreign domestic helpers by suggesting that they should stay at home. That was part of a strategy to reduce as much as possible social contacts or what we call social distancing. That also takes into account now the currently limited supply of face masks, because if they all go out and they enjoy their day as we have seen from time to time on Sundays in various parts of Hong Kong, they are no doubt in a crowd, which means that they will have to wear masks and protect themselves attending those events. In the same way that the Government has cancelled, and many associations have also cancelled, events of a particular scale, whether it's outdoor event or indoor event, I think the Labour Department's advice is based on that very same consideration.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your question. Regarding active surveillance and contact tracing as well as isolating the close contacts of patients, there are a number of ways to do so. Of course, putting people into quarantine camps is one of the ways. Another way is home quarantine, that is, people staying at their home for 14 days. The idea of home quarantine is ensuring people to isolate themselves at home and not to come out into the community so that the risk of transmission in the community would be reduced. Way back many years ago, for example during SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) (outbreak in Hong Kong), there are people guarding at the entrances of the buildings or outside homes to make sure that the people (being quarantined) could not go out. But now, I think after so many years, there are lots of technology that can help doing the work in terms of tracing the contacts where they are, and to ensure that they are staying at home and not going out into the community. The development of these technology in terms of providing (devices) to these contacts is really to ensure that they stay at home, so that the entire quarantine procedures can be more efficient and probably to save manpower to check whether these people are at home. As for your question on the two confirmed cases, I would like to invite the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan, to provide more information.

Director of Health: I do not have the details of the two confirmed cases that were reported in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, referring to your question on the nature of the coronavirus, indeed this is a novel coronavirus and it has only been identified in the recent few weeks. So you will note in the statement by the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding declaring this disease as a public health emergency of international concern, it specifically suggested that one should collaborate with WHO and partners to conduct investigation to understand the epidemiology and evaluate the measures, and it also encouraged the sharing of data on human cases and it also suggests supporting research. So that is why I think the Mainland scientists are working very hard and they have also shared a lot of information with the international community and they will continue to do

research in this regard, and a number of the experts in Hong Kong are actually contributing to research in this area.

Chief Executive: In case media friends have more interest on the electronic devices that we have developed for the home quarantine, I'm happy to ask my colleagues in the Innovation and Technology Bureau together with their partners to give a briefing next week.

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

