

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

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (August 2). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong; and the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: As 70 per cent of civil servants have already been vaccinated, why do we still have to boost further? And there have not been any local cases for the past month, are you forcing others to get vaccinated? And how will the civil servants be punished if they don't follow the rules? Also, are there any scientific base to allow only non-academic activities for another half day for the students, for the pupils, when mask-off activities and instrumental classes are actually more risky?

Chief Executive: Patrick and then Kevin.

Secretary for the Civil Service: As regards the need for getting vaccination, I think it is very clear if we look at the global epidemic situation, especially the Delta variant virus, maybe more to come, that we need to build a defence barrier to protect the community. Seventy per cent vaccination rate, I think, is the basic. Although it is good to see that the percentage of civil servants receiving first dose is now about 70 per cent, there is a need for the civil servants to protect himself and herself, to protect the public that they serve, and also to protect the community that they have the duty to get vaccinated. Hence, we introduce this vaccination in lieu of regular testing since the end of May, and to implement it by phases, and now we expand to all government employees starting from today. So we allow sufficient time for colleagues to get vaccinated. If they refuse to do so not for the reason of medically unfit, I think that this is not an act in accordance with the requirement. We will follow up in accordance with our established practice.

There is a set of disciplinary actions that we could follow, having regard to the act or misconduct or whatever, depending on the circumstances.

Secretary for Education: For schools, our current arrangement is from September, we will be back on (the basis of) half-day, face-to-face lessons. And at the same time, we also require all staff at schools to be vaccinated or undergo regular testing. For those schools having over 70 per cent of students vaccinated, we allow them to have full-day classes. This is in response to the concern raised by many health professionals or experts saying that mask-off lunch is one of the very high risk areas. We are not talking about whether the activity by itself in another half-day is risky or not. But if you have to have full-day lessons or full-day activities, then you have to look after their lunch arrangements. When they are having lunch, then they

have to take off their masks, this is where the risk comes in. According to our arrangements, for example, if a student has taken the second dose of vaccine, we will allow him/her to stay at school in the afternoon for some non-academic activities. This provides flexibility so that students could have more chances to exercise, practise musical instruments and things like that. We say that it is non-academic because parents are usually very concerned about academic lessons. If we allow some students to have lessons in the afternoon but not all students, then there would be some concerns on whether it is fair or not. So we are making all possibility and flexibility to allow students to have more activities in the afternoon if they have taken the second dose of vaccine. It's not against whether these are academic or non-academic activities, but more concerned about parents' response.

Reporter: First of all, will the Government consider providing a third booster shot vaccine or allowing those who got Sinovac to mix vaccines? And second of all, the Government has declared the fourth wave over, but has now tightened travel rules and extended social distancing. With compulsory mask, four-person limit and travel quarantine for vaccinated citizens, do you fear there's a risk of causing resentment or that people will stop complying when the infection rate is so low? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I will answer the second question and invite the Secretary for Food and Health to address the question about providing a third dose. As I have called this presentation, it is aiming to build a double barrier for Hong Kong to fight the COVID-19 situation because there is simply no room for complacency despite the fact that we have achieved zero local confirmed cases for 56 days, because Hong Kong is a very well-connected international city. The world around us is facing this challenge of another major rebound, as you can see from the seven-day moving average that I have shown you. With that in mind, if we start to relax or to open our borders without subjecting passengers arriving Hong Kong to any quarantine, then we are putting the whole community at risk. We are, sort of, defeating the many, many efforts made by many, many people over many, many months in fighting the COVID-19. We have to continue to remain very vigilant and to adopt the effective measures that we have been adopting. At the same time, we try to rationalise, for example, re-declassifying the countries according to their level of risk and differentiating between those who have been fully vaccinated and those who have not. I would describe all these as being a more and more sophisticated approach to ensure border controls.

Similarly, for social distancing, we have been adopting a very prudent but also very sophisticated approach to allow different types of businesses to resume their operations in the past three months, and the effects are very visible. As you can see, there are a lot of activities going on, the restaurants are more or less full and people are going to various activities. Again this is not the time to relax, otherwise we will be putting Hong Kong people at risk. I hope and I appeal to people of Hong Kong to continue to adopt their very co-operative, very compliant approach in wearing the mask on most occasions and also adopting the public health measures, and avoid big crowds in order to keep the city safe. Professor Chan.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you, CE. Regarding the third dose, our

Joint Scientific Committee under the Centre for Health Protection has had its initial discussion on this topic. Initially, I think they are looking for more data – more data from local research as well as from overseas data, and also any recommendation from the WHO, World Health Organization, regarding the third dose or the booster dose. So, the initial discussion is that there is no urgency for the general public who have been vaccinated to receive the third dose. But if they get more data, they would further look into whether there is a need for those immunocompromised patients or high-risk patients to receive the third dose. And also what is the appropriate period in between the second dose and also third dose. They are looking into various details about if we need to have the third dose, how we are going to administer, how we are going to do it, who will be eligible, and also the period in between. They are still collecting more data and further discussions will be ongoing in the Joint Scientific Committee.

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

