

Transcript of remarks of press conference (with photos)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference today (September 15). Also joining were the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung; the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; 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: Chief Executive or Professor Chan, on the relaxation of the social distancing measures, officials and experts keep asking people not to let their guard down. But do you think the Government is sending an inconsistent message by reopening the bars and karaoke seemingly encouraging people to have more social gatherings and activities? And on the relief measures, Chief Executive, some lawmakers, including the DAB party, have called for another round of cash handouts of \$5,000 or \$10,000, saying this can help promote the economy. Will you consider that? I have one more question about the testing scheme. The Government has spent more than \$500 million on the testing scheme, and you said about 40 cases were identified. Some critics may say that works out to more than \$10 million per case identified. Is this expenditure within your expectations? And do you think that's cost effective? And do you know how much money Mainland authorities spent on testing?

Chief Executive: Professor Chan, you address the question about social distancing and then I invite either CS or FS to talk about the cash handouts and I may come back to the final question together with Patrick.

Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, thank you very much for your question about relaxation. I have always emphasized that even with our fourth stage of relaxation, it is not a total relaxation, it is with conditions. These conditions emphasize on, for example reducing the risk of the mask-off activities, having a capacity limit on the number of people, as well as distance between people while these activities are ongoing. So I think we have put in these conditions in the relaxation.

Secondly, we all know that we are under this new normal situation, because before we have vaccine, the virus is going to be with us. On the one hand, we want to reduce the risk of infection in the community, but on the other hand, people would like to resume to their normal life, we also want to resume some economic activities, so there are all these calls in the community. During this stage of relaxation, we also emphasize that people should be vigilant while they are going out. I think I have also said earlier that we are not able to go back to the relaxation situation in June. The relaxation is gradual, systematic. We are continuing reviewing the entire situation.

Another important point is now that we have increased our capacity of testing. We are now having a testing strategy whereby we are testing and having more sentinel surveillance of the community situation, that is we have increased the number of testing in our general outpatient clinics to 30 GOPCs (General Out-patient Clinics) within this week and further increased the number of GOPCs in distributing sample bottles to 40 by the end of September, and there will be further expansion as announced by the Hospital Authority. The target group testing will also resume and be expanding, so the entire surveillance of the community would be increased in terms of the social distancing measures. There will be further monitoring of the social distancing measures relaxation so that we can have a more sophisticated and targeted relaxation from now on. Thank you.

Chief Executive: FS, cash payout.

Financial Secretary: We understand the financial hardship that many people are going through at the moment because of the economic situation. However, as public resources are finite, we believe that through a combination of measures and adopting a more targeted approach is more appropriate in the current circumstances in order to assist those hard-hit sectors and people most affected by the COVID-19. Thank you.

Chief Executive: As regards the question of cost effectiveness, I said this morning and it was also repeated by the Secretary for the Civil Service just now that this Universal Community Testing Programme has made multiple contributions to our anti-epidemic efforts. And it is not easy, or actually it is not quite right to reflect or measure these benefits by the unit cost of a confirmed case. If I may just recount an experience I had to answer your question, I still remember in the 1990s when I was sent to the Department of Health to assume a position, the then-Director of Health, who was a very distinguished public health doctor, told me that it was always very difficult to get resources for public health because if you did it well, there will be no cases in society so people will think that "well, you have done nothing so why do you come forward to ask for money?" The effectiveness and the success of public health lies in keeping the people safe, keeping the people away from disease, infections and so on. And I will just add that in this term of Government, with my own conviction in primary healthcare and supported by the Secretary for Food and Health, we are trying to, sort of, shift more attention to primary healthcare, whether it is in a public health arena, in the health promotion, disease prevention, screening, and the setting up of the 18 district health centres. I hope that society will from now on, hopefully, take this view about our investment in the public health arena.

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

