

LCQ19: Community isolation facilities

Following is a question by the Hon Judy Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 25):

Question:

With the epidemic in Hong Kong having been brought under control gradually, some community isolation facilities (CIFs) have been suspended or have ceased to operate. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current total number of CIFs (including the facilities which have been suspended or have ceased to operate), and set out by name of such facilities their respective service targets and utilisation rates; whether it has plans to change the uses of those facilities which have ceased to operate; if so, of the details;

(2) of the current number and utilisation rate of those quarantine facilities dedicated for inbound foreign domestic helpers (FDHs), as well as the lowest and highest fees charged for the relevant facilities; whether it has assessed if the number of such facilities is sufficient to meet the demand; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the details; whether it will consider turning some of the CIFs with relatively low utilisation rates into quarantine facilities dedicated for FDHs, and allowing employers of FDHs to rent the relevant facilities at reasonable prices for use by FDHs whom they have employed; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as the typhoon season will soon begin in Hong Kong, whether it has reviewed the pre-typhoon preparatory measures and drainage systems of various CIFs, as well as carried out repair and maintenance works for the facilities which have been suspended or have ceased to operate; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Security Bureau (SB), Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and Development Bureau (DEVB), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Judy Chan is as follows:

(1) In the light of the fifth wave of COVID-19, the Government will, depending on the health risk, care needs and transmission risk in the household, make arrangements for infected persons according to the multi-tiered triage and treatment strategy for suitable treatment and isolation. Asymptomatic patients who require no medical support but have to be isolated somewhere other than their household due to their care needs or household environment will be arranged to be admitted to community isolation facilities

(CIFs) to reduce the risk of transmission. Besides, persons who have entered Hong Kong from overseas and are tested positive at the airport or designated quarantine hotels (DQHs) generally will be admitted to CIF hotels to undergo isolation. Having regard to the development of the epidemic and cost-effectiveness, the Government is focusing on utilising the Penny's Bay CIF and one CIF Hotel. The remaining CIFs at Tsing Yi, San Tin, Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, Fanling, Hung Shui Kiu and Yuen Long have been put into standby mode. As the epidemic has not yet come to an end, the Government still needs to reserve these CIFs so as to ensure that Hong Kong can cope with a possible sixth wave of epidemic if it arrives.

(2) Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the Government has arranged for foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) to come to Hong Kong in a gradual and orderly manner on the premise of guarding against importation of infected cases, so as to meet the need of local families for FDHs. Since March 1, 2022, FDHs coming to work in Hong Kong may be admitted to a DQH as with other inbound travellers from overseas, instead of having to be admitted to a designated quarantine facility for FDHs as before. The arrangement provides greater flexibility for FDH employers to make the most appropriate quarantine arrangement for FDHs. Meanwhile, to meet the demand, the Government has gradually increased the number of DQH rooms from around 6 000 at end-March to around 22 000 at present, with over half of the DQHs providing rooms with a standard rate of under \$800 per night. According to the room-booking statistics provided by the hotels, as at May 23, the overall booking rate for May and June is around 65 per cent and 70 per cent respectively. The Government will closely monitor the supply-and-demand of DQH rooms and make adjustments when needed.

(3) To ensure the safety of both users and staff of the CIFs managed by the Government, relevant bureaux and departments including the DEVB, SB, Architectural Services Department, Drainage Services Department, Hong Kong Observatory and related building contractors have formulated severe weather contingency plans and mechanisms for maintaining close communication, inspecting the facilities in CIFs and carrying out improvement/reinforcement works as well as implementing response measures.

Concerning the Penny's Bay CIF that is in operation, staff members have already put in place a contingency plan for adverse weather, including forming an emergency response team to strengthen their ability to cope with the situation concerned. Once there is a forecast of typhoon or adverse weather, corresponding actions will be immediately taken. They include removing or securing outdoor facilities that are not firmly affixed beforehand; arranging cleansing workers to inspect drainage and clear the blockage regularly to prevent flooding; suspending non-essential outdoor work and reminding all staff to put on appropriate protective gears when working outdoors; and monitoring the latest weather/typhoon information and direction so that the staff may consider suspending all admission to and discharge from the CIF in case of extremely adverse weather.

As for the CIFs in standby mode, apart from having members of SB's Anti-epidemic Task Force working on shift to manage the facilities on-site, the

contractors of the Department of Health will continue to deploy security personnel and cleansing workers in accordance with the practical need to assist in inspection of the facilities and maintenance work such as cleansing.