

LCQ3: Supply of anti-epidemic items

Following is a question by the Hon James To and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

As the novel coronavirus epidemic has been serious recently, various government departments, public organisations and members of the public have a strong demand for anti-epidemic items. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the quantities received and (ii) the stock held, by the public healthcare system in respect of the various types of anti-epidemic items each day from January 21 to February 21 this year;

(2) in respect of the face masks produced by the Correctional Services Department (CSD), of (i) the quantity retained for use by the Department, and (ii) the respective quantities supplied to the following government departments, public organisations and non-governmental organisations each month since December last year (set out in a table): Hong Kong Police Force, Customs and Excise Department, Immigration Department, Hong Kong Fire Services Department, Independent Commission Against Corruption, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Department of Health, Administration Wing of the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, Hongkong Post, Auxiliary Medical Service, Home Affairs Department, and the various public health-related organisations such as the Hospital Authority (HA);

(3) of the protection specifications of the face masks currently produced by CSD, and whether such specifications meet those prescribed by HA for face mask procurement; if not, whether CSD will produce face masks which meet the specifications prescribed by HA;

(4) of CSD's current stock of face masks available for distribution;

(5) of the stock of the various raw materials (including aluminum/plastic strips, elastic bands, non-woven fabrics and filter papers) currently used by CSD for producing face masks, and the places of origin of those raw materials; the number of face masks that can be produced with such stock;

(6) whether CSD will recruit volunteers who possess the knowledge of operating sewing machines to join the production line of face masks so as to increase output; if so, when the recruitment will be conducted; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(7) whether it will distribute face masks free of charge to the elderly in Hong Kong; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

With consolidated input from relevant policy bureaux and departments, my reply to the questions raised by the Hon James To is as follows:

(1) As at February 20, the stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) of public hospitals include approximately 18 million surgical masks, 2.3 million isolation gowns, 0.45 million face shields and 1.19 million N95 respirators.

(2) The Government Logistics Department (GLD) procures masks from the Correctional Services Department (CSD) as well as other suppliers through various channels. As masks provided by different suppliers are handled collectively, GLD does not have a breakdown of the number of masks provided by individual suppliers.

In light of the developments concerning the disease, all government departments have worked very hard to keep their demands for masks to a minimum. GLD will comply strictly with distribution guidelines and accord priority to front-line staff participating in quarantine-related work, execution of quarantine orders (including medical and port health staff of the Department of Health) and maintenance of essential public services.

(3) According to tests conducted by accredited laboratories, the bacterial filtration efficiency (BFE) and particulate filtration efficiency (PFE) of filter masks produced by the CSD are over 99% and 98% respectively.

As for the procurement of surgical masks by the Hospital Authority (HA), it has mainly made reference to the US Food and Drug Administration's standards on surgical mask, ASTM F2100-11. ASTM accredits surgical masks that are up to standard in 4 aspects, including BFE, PFE, synthetic blood resistance and delta-P/differential pressure. With the ongoing development of COVID-19, HA has significantly increased its usage of PPE, and has been striving to expedite procurement. HA also takes into consideration other international standards when sourcing surgical masks, including European Standards, EN14683.

(4) and (6) In 2019, CSD produced an average of about 1.1 million masks per month. In an effort to meet the demand for masks from government departments, CSD has increased its output on three occasions since January 2020. Moreover, since early February, it has been producing masks around the clock, increasing its monthly output to about 1.8 million masks. CSD has subsequently recruited over 800 off-duty and retired CSD officers as volunteers in mask production work since February 7. The target is for output to reach 2.5 million masks per month.

(5) Raw materials for masks are supplied to CSD by suppliers on a monthly basis in accordance with contractual requirements. According to the information provided by suppliers, the raw materials are imported. At

present, CSD keeps raw materials that is sufficient for the production of masks over one month.

(7) The Government will work closely with the community, striving to meet the people's needs in the prevention and control of disease. The Government will provide 1 million masks to residential care homes for elderly and residential homes for persons with disabilities, so as to support their continuous operation. The Government has also received donations of masks and disinfection supplies from a number of kind-hearted organisations and individuals; and will support them in the distribution of masks to relevant organisations and underprivileged members of the community. For example, masks will be provided to high-risk patients (e.g. the elderly and pregnant women) and medical workers through the HA, as well as to elders and needy households through major charities.