

LCQ6: Quarantine facilities

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

While the Government has been searching for suitable premises for use as temporary quarantine facilities since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic in Hong Kong, it has encountered much difficulty. On the other hand, among the camps operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), only Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp was earlier on used as a temporary quarantine facility. Regarding the provision of quarantine facilities, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of quarantine residential places provided by the previous and current quarantine facilities;
- (2) whether, since the current outbreak of the epidemic, the Government has discussed with the various NGOs the borrowing of the camps operated by them for use as temporary quarantine facilities; if so, of the details (including the party initiating the discussions); if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether, before the onset of the current outbreak of the epidemic, it had drawn up a standing list of the properties of the Government and NGOs which were suitable for use as temporary quarantine facilities, so that sufficient quarantine facilities might be provided expeditiously when there was an outbreak of an epidemic; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) is an unprecedented virus which is highly contagious and fast-spreading, and the outbreak situation is evolving rapidly. To cope with the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government has been adopting a strategy of "containment" with specific measures to achieve the purposes of early identification, early isolation and early treatment as well as a suite of measures to reduce population mobility and in-population social contacts. Apart from admitting patients confirmed or suspected to be infected to hospitals for isolation and treatment, putting close contacts who may have been exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19 (including close contacts of confirmed patients) under compulsory quarantine at quarantine centres is also a crucial element of the anti-epidemic work.

With a view to effectively responding to novel infectious diseases including COVID-19, the Government has formulated the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance,

which clearly set out the investigation and control measures under different response levels. The Department of Health would get prepared in collaboration with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to transform suitable holiday camps into quarantine centres as and when necessary.

The rapid development of the outbreak in Hong Kong and around the world since the end of January this year has led to a surge in demand on quarantine facilities, including successive occurrence of local infection cases, surge in imported cases, increasing proportion of close contact persons among confirmed cases, the need to bring back Hong Kong residents who were stranded in Hubei Province and those on the Diamond Princess cruise, as well as the immediate evacuation for the purpose of disease investigation of infection cases, etc. In this connection and since the suitable holiday camps could only provide limited number of quarantine units, there has been a pressing need for the Government to provide a large number of quarantine facilities within a short period of time, and the Government has been looking for suitable sites in full steam since late January.

When searching for sites for setting up quarantine facilities, an inter-departmental team would conduct assessment on every possible site to thoroughly examine whether the location and facilities of the sites meet the requirements for use as quarantine centres. Among others, it is crucial for the facilities to be ready for use within an extremely short period of time. As such, priority would go to premises under the ownership and management of the Government when considering suitable sites. Indeed, we are very grateful to the suggestions offered by different sectors of the society and non-governmental organisations on possible sites for use as quarantine centres over the period, and have rented individual sites deemed suitable for such use after consideration. Nevertheless, suitable sites meeting the aforesaid requirements are limited.

As at May 19, the Government has set up quarantine centres at the following sites:

- (1) Lady MacLehose Holiday Village, providing 45 units;
- (2) Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp, providing 25 units;
- (3) Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village in Chai Wan (including the constructed units at basketball court and football field), providing 379 units;
- (4) Heritage Lodge of Jao Tsung-I Academy, providing 53 units;
- (5) Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre in Pat Heung, providing 208 units; and
- (6) Chun Yeung Estate, providing 3 121 units.

Among the above, two smaller quarantine facilities, namely the Lady MacLehose Holiday Village and the Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp were no longer used for housing close contacts since early March, to achieve better manpower deployment and utilisation of facilities.

In light of the rapid and volatile development of COVID-19, it is difficult to accurately predict the demand on quarantine facilities. Therefore, we must plan ahead and continue to increase provision of

quarantine facilities as far as possible. The Government has also been setting up additional quarantine facilities through construction works at other sites. Construction works of providing 99 quarantine units at the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre has been completed. As to the government site at Penny's Bay, it is expected that the works would be completed by July, providing some 800 units. In addition, the Government will also construct quarantine units at the site reserved for future tourism development at Penny's Bay and is making preparations to kick start the works concerned. According to preliminary estimation, additional 700 units could be provided by September.

Thanks to the concerted effort and support across different parties in the community, the Government has been able to increase thousands of quarantine units within a short period of time. In the long run, we consider it necessary to set up permanent quarantine facilities in Hong Kong in preparation for any possible outbreaks of disease in the future. We would review the overall situation after the current outbreak and assess the long term quarantine needs of Hong Kong, in order to make early preparations for other possible outbreaks of disease.