

SED opening remarks at press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on measures of fighting disease with the Chair Professor of Public Health Medicine, and Founding Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Control at the University of Hong Kong, Professor Gabriel Leung; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko; and the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, today (January 25) at the Central Government Offices, Tamar. Following is the English translation of the opening remarks by Mr Yeung at the press conference:

In view of an increase in the number of confirmed and suspected Novel Coronavirus infection cases and the increasing risk of the spread of the virus in crowded environment in a short period of time when people travel abroad and visit relatives during the Chinese New Year holidays, the Education Bureau (EDB) today announced that all schools (including kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools) will extend their Chinese New Year holidays to February 16 (i.e. class resumption on February 17) to safeguard students' health. During the period, we will continue to assess the situation. We have also contacted universities and tertiary institutions to ask them to consider extending the date of class resumption.

During the original scheduled school days, schools should keep their premises open. They should arrange suitable number of staff to be on duty to look after students who have to go back to school otherwise they would be unattended at home, and handle school affairs and parents' enquiries. Schools should also cancel the scheduled examinations, tests and activities and make appropriate re-arrangements. Parents and students should be informed accordingly.

We call on students to stay at home as far as possible during the extended period of school holidays. Schools can provide learning materials to students through emails, school homepages and other effective means, including online resources from Hong Kong Education City and other educational websites to facilitate students' self-learning at home.

We call on parents to enhance home-school co-operation and take proper care of their children, pay more attention to environmental and personal hygiene, and avoid allowing their children to go to overcrowded places so as to reduce the risk of infection.

Schools are also advised to make good preparation for class resumption during this period, eg preparing for cleaning and disinfection items to cater for the needs of individual students. In addition, schools should thoroughly clean the premises to ensure a clean and hygienic environment, as well as strengthening health education.

As regards the arrangements for the provision of a student grant of \$2,500 to day-school students in the 2019/20 school year, schools are originally requested to submit the application forms completed by parents on or before February 14. As some schools may not be able to collect the forms on time, we will extend the deadline for submission by two weeks to February 28.

Since the epidemic outbreak in Wuhan and other cities on the Mainland is still developing, we have suspended and postponed students' exchange programmes on the Mainland. We have also called on tertiary institutions to make similar arrangements for internship and exchange activities.

The EDB will continue to maintain close liaison with relevant government departments including the Centre for Health Protection, inform schools of the latest information and relevant measures on infectious diseases, and provide necessary support to schools.