

SFH attends WHO Western Pacific regional meeting (with photos)

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, today (October 6) attended the virtual meeting of the 71st session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for the Western Pacific.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related public health restrictions, the Regional Committee meeting this year is being held through video conferencing. The meeting focuses on the anti-epidemic work by members of the Regional Committee and regional co-operation.

"Being at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has since December 31, 2019, rolled out measures, including a Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance, with decisive actions on our prevention and control measures, focusing on border control measures, testing, tracing, quarantine and isolation, and social distancing measures. Hong Kong had responded promptly and successfully to a few waves of epidemics so far. The current wave has subsided from its peak now but there are still sporadic local cases among the recent confirmed cases, indicating the existence of silent transmission chains in the community. The HKSAR Government will spare no efforts in containing the spread of the disease using the containment strategy," Professor Chan said during the discussion on COVID-19.

Professor Chan also shared experiences in running the Universal Community Testing Programme (UCTP), which was earlier launched with strong support from the Central People's Government and has been concluded recently. The UCTP has identified new confirmed cases within a short time and successfully reduced the potential for transmission in the community.

"We will continue to stay vigilant to cope with the next wave of the COVID-19 epidemic, which is expected to arrive this winter and will likely be more severe than the previous wave. We are actively reviewing our existing measures, consolidating experience gained, strengthening our current capacities and mapping out targeted and refined strategies in tackling the next wave of the epidemic. Control measures to prevent the spread of disease under the multi-pronged approach include stringent implementation of cross-boundary epidemic control measures; comprehensive enhancements to epidemic surveillance and testing; enhancements to manpower and efficiency in contact tracing; additional backup quarantine and isolation facilities, including building more community treatment facilities and a temporary isolation hospital; procurement and preparation for administration of vaccines and maintaining our social distancing measures. We are also providing funding to support medical and health research on COVID-19 and have implemented effective risk communication strategies such as daily press conferences, a dedicated website for information dissemination and other community

engagement interventions."

Professor Chan also reaffirmed the HKSAR Government's commitment in maintaining close collaboration with the WHO and the Regional Committee in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Mr Thomas Chan; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; and the Acting Controller of the Centre for Health Protection, Dr Ronald Lam, are also members of the HKSAR Government delegation.

