

# Transcript of remarks of media session (with video)

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, met the media this morning (February 19). Following is the transcript of remarks of the media session:

Reporter: Mr Lee, can you update the situation in Japan right now? How many Hong Kong people are going to be brought back from Japan to Hong Kong today? How are you going to persuade Japanese authorities to bring back all Hong Kong people as soon as possible? And also do you have similar plans for the people stuck in Hubei right now?

Secretary for Security: First of all, we have contacted all Hong Kong residents (on board the Diamond Princess cruise) and over two hundred (residents) have indicated they will be taking our chartered flight. We have been pressing the Japanese authorities to give priorities to the treatment of Hong Kong residents. The Japanese authorities have indicated they will start allowing passengers on board the cruise to disembark today after the passengers have been tested negative. So far we know that between 20 and 30 Hong Kong passengers should have been tested negative. We are pressing for more results today, so hopefully the number of Hong Kong people who are confirmed to be negative will increase. We are pressing the Japanese authorities to allow them all to come down. Our aim is to allow all Hong Kong residents to be allowed to disembark today so that they will all be sent back to Hong Kong as soon as possible. But there is still a lot of information that we have asked for but the Japanese authorities have not provided answers. For example, how many Hong Kong residents have been tested positive? And how many are negative? How many are regarded as close contacts who may have to continue to stay in Japan? How many, if they are required to quarantine, are quarantined on the ship or on land? And we have asked the Japanese authorities to allow Hong Kong residents even if they stay to be quarantined, that should be done on land. The Director of Immigration and the Under Secretary for Security have been pressing the Japanese authorities for all these things. Today I will be in touch with the Japan CG (Japanese Consul-General) in Hong Kong to reflect the concerns of the stranded Hong Kong residents on the cruise and to explain that because we have a large number (of Hong Kong residents on board). So it is in everybody's interest that priority is given to Hong Kong residents, so that they can come back as soon as possible. And I will be reflecting the full demands of the Hong Kong Government so as to ask the Japan CG to assist us.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

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## Import of poultry meat and products from Tra Vinh Province in Vietnam suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (February 19) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Tra Vinh Province in Vietnam, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the province with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that Hong Kong has currently established a protocol with Vietnam for the import of poultry eggs but not for poultry meat. Hong Kong imported about 975 000 poultry eggs from Vietnam last year, according to the Census and Statistics Department.

"The CFS has contacted the Vietnamese authorities over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the OIE on avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

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## LC Urgent Q2: Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak

Following is an urgent question by Dr the Hon Kwok Ka-ki under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (February 19):

Question:

As the novel coronavirus epidemic is raging throughout the Hubei Province, have the authorities closely monitored the conditions of those Hong Kong people stranded in the Hubei Province and rendered them appropriate assistance, and will the authorities expeditiously make arrangements for them to return to Hong Kong; what are the details of the authorities' work in this regard; in addition, do the authorities know what immediate measures that the Hospital Authority (HA) has put in place to ensure that adequate protective equipment is available for use by healthcare personnel so as to reduce their risks of contracting the virus, and whether HA has devised a contingency plan

to deal with the situation where all items of the protective equipment have been used up?

Reply:

President,

The situation of the novel coronavirus infection is serious. It is the top priority of the Government and the Hong Kong community to step up our efforts to prevent and control the infection. We understand that members of the community are very concerned about the situation of Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei Province owing to the outbreak of the virus and the support provided to them by the Government, as well as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government's ability to provide healthcare staff with an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) as the situation unfolds.

The HKSAR Government is very concerned about the situation of Hong Kong people in Hubei Province and maintains close communication with them through the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Wuhan (WHETO). WHETO has been actively following up on their cases and liaising with relevant local authorities to provide every appropriate and practicable assistance. As at February 18, we received more than 1 300 requests for assistance from Hong Kong people in Hubei Province, involving more than 2 500 Hong Kong people scattering over 30 cities in the Province. Some of them are in remote places such as Enshi and Shiyan.

We understand that some of the Hong Kong people in Hubei Province, especially those with chronic illnesses, require medicines provided from Hong Kong. WHETO has co-ordinated with the Department of Health (DH) and contacted the Hong Kong people in need to gather information about their medical history in Hong Kong, with a view to obtaining medicines that they need from the Hospital Authority (HA) or from private medical practitioners through their relatives and friends in Hong Kong. Given that these Hong Kong people are scattered in different locations across the Province, the medicines have to be further distributed to their respective places of residence after delivery to Wuhan. The HKSAR Government is working full steam ahead on this matter. As at February 18, arrangements have been made to deliver medicines to 120 Hong Kong people in Hubei Province.

In addition, DH has set up a health hotline to provide medical information to Hong Kong people in Hubei Province. WHETO has also provided them with contacts of medical organisations in Wuhan which offer online medical consultation services, through which those in need may seek medical advice. They may also call the emotional support hotlines operated by a non-governmental organisation for assistance.

After receiving requests for assistance, the relevant departments of the HKSAR Government have been making assessments and plans on bringing the Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei Province back to Hong Kong, including assessing in a thorough and prudent manner the risk on public health and the

practicality of the operation. We have to not only avoid cross-infection among the returnees on their way back to Hong Kong, but also consider the quarantine arrangements for the returnees upon their arrival in Hong Kong. The latter includes the need to have sufficient quarantine facilities.

To minimise the risk of community-acquired infections, returnees from Hubei Province have to undergo 14-day quarantine and isolation in quarantine centres. Given that the number of Hong Kong people in Hubei Province is not small and in view of the current situation, the HKSAR Government will need to arrange their return to Hong Kong in batches. We will proceed with caution and continue to co-ordinate and follow up with the relevant Mainland authorities. We will also maintain contact with the Hong Kong people in Hubei Province and provide them with every appropriate and practicable assistance, with a view to helping them return to Hong Kong as soon as possible.

In respect of PPE of HA, with the development of the novel coronavirus infection, HA has expedited the procurement of PPE since January this year. Owing to the recent significant increase in the consumption of PPE, the stockpile of PPE in public hospitals as at February 15, which includes approximately 18 million surgical masks, 2.2 million protective gowns, 0.5 million face shields and 1.1 million N95 respirators, is only adequate for about one month's consumption. HA will use the stock prudently on a need basis to ensure that adequate PPE is available for use by healthcare staff.

Public hospitals have established guidelines on the use of PPE for medical procedures of different risk levels. Training is provided to allow frontline healthcare staff of various positions to understand and get familiar with infection control measures required for different medical procedures, including on the use of suitable PPE. Healthcare staff will put on suitable PPE depending on the type of infectious disease that the patient has, including whether it can be transmitted by droplets, is airborne or can be transmitted by contact. Healthcare worker treating patients in high-risk areas or performing high-risk procedures will need to wear a full set of suitable PPE, including a N95 respirator. Ward facilities and arrangements for collecting patient specimens will also comply with the corresponding requirements on infection control.

At the moment, the transport and logistics supply of PPE is tight globally and there is a shortage of raw materials for manufacturing PPE. With the delivery by suppliers slowing down and shipments reducing, the stock of PPE kept by HA has been decreasing. Accordingly, public hospitals have strengthened stock control and reminded healthcare staff of the proper use of PPE. With the Government's co-ordination, some of the gears ordered earlier by HA has been delivered progressively since early February. HA will continue to endeavour to expedite the procurement of PPE so as to ensure that adequate PPE is provided to frontline healthcare staff for provision of services. Thank you, President.

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## LC Urgent Q1: Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak

Following is an urgent question by the Hon Alice Mak under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (February 19):

Question:

As the authorities suspected that the cause for a tenant in Hong Mei House of Cheung Hong Estate in Tsing Yi being infected with the novel coronavirus recently was that a pipe of the toilet in the tenant's unit had not been sealed up, arrangements were made for around a hundred tenants in the building to live in quarantine centres temporarily. Has the Government laid down criteria specifying the circumstances under which mandatory closure of certain premises and temporary evacuation of the residents therein will be warranted; if not, whether it will forthwith do so; furthermore, whether the Government will immediately send officers to inspect those public housing units whose sewerage system is of a design similar to that of Cheung Hong Estate, with a view to preventing recurrence of similar incidents which will increase the risk of the virus spreading; besides, given that the outbreak has continued to aggravate, with an increasing number of people who are subject to quarantine or isolation, whether sufficient number of quarantine and isolation centres are in place and what are the related details (including the number of places as well as the status of their usage and demand); and whether there are plans to requisition other facilities or premises, etc. for quarantine and isolation uses in an effort to increase supply to meet the demand?

Reply:

President,

First of all, on behalf of the Government, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the President for convening today's meeting and allowing us the opportunity to respond to Members' questions regarding the Government's work on handling the virus outbreak. I would also like to thank all the attending Members as well as the Legislative Council Secretariat staff and colleagues who have helped arrange this meeting.

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus infection, the Government has been closely monitoring the development of the situation and responded comprehensively with decisive and appropriate measures. In accordance with the Government's prevention and control strategies, we have introduced specific measures in the areas of health surveillance, compulsory quarantine, isolation treatment, health declaration, exit screening, reducing the flow of people between Hong Kong and the Mainland, enhancing "social distancing" locally, supporting front-line healthcare staff and provision of sufficient

personal protective equipment.

Today, 11 Directors of Bureaux and I stand ready to answer Members' questions on the Government's work in disease prevention and control, demonstrating that we attach great importance to our relation with the Council and the principle of working in an open and transparent manner. I will first respond to the questions raised by Hon Alice Mak, explaining the Government's follow-up work in relation to a confirmed case of novel coronavirus infection at Hong Mei House of Cheung Hong Estate in Tsing Yi and reporting on the arrangements for quarantine and isolation facilities.

Under the existing mechanism, if there is a cluster of infection in the same building or premises, or in adjacent buildings or premises, and environmental factors are suspected to have contributed to the spread of the disease concerned, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) will coordinate with the relevant Government departments and organisations and activate the "Multi-disciplinary Response Team" to investigate and examine if environmental factors are involved in the infection cases. If the investigation results show that environmental factors may have caused the spread of the disease, CHP will arrange for an asymptomatic resident be evacuated to a quarantine centre as a prudent infection control measure. Meanwhile, a symptomatic resident will be sent to a hospital for treatment.

Regarding the infection cases involving residents living at Hong Mei House of Cheung Hong Estate in Tsing Yi with the same orientation but on different floors, a Multi-disciplinary Response Team was immediately activated by CHP after detecting the cluster of infection cases. The Housing Department (HD) also took the initiative to inspect the units that shared the same dung channels or sewers and vent pipes with the units with infection cases. HD would conduct repairs to the pipes and vents concerned as appropriate during the inspection process.

In fact, buildings with Trident block design under the Housing Authority were completed from 1984 to 1991, and the sewage facilities, including the vent pipe in the toilet, met all the prevailing legal requirements as well as environmental hygiene and safety standards. There are no design issues involved. Hong Mei House is one of the buildings with Trident block design. The vent pipes connecting to the sewage drainage pipe are an indispensable part of the drainage system. There may be health risks if a resident improperly modifies the vent pipe in the toilet without making a formal application for the Housing Authority's approval for alteration work.

For the cases of Hong Mei House, HD found that the household concerned on the lower floor had performed modifications to the pedestal toilet by cutting off the vent pipes connecting to the toilet without the Housing Authority's approval. HD has posted notice to remind tenants that prior approval must be obtained from the Housing Authority before any alteration work can be carried out. In addition, unauthorised modification of the pipes may also violate the Buildings Ordinance and/or breach the terms of the tenancy. If a tenant is concerned about the drainage pipe condition, or

whether the modification of the pipes would pose any health risks, he/she can contact the relevant estate office for appropriate follow-up.

With regards to quarantine facilities, the Government is currently operating four quarantine centres for putting asymptomatic close contacts of confirmed cases under compulsory quarantine. The four quarantine centres are the Lady MacLehose Holiday Village, the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, the Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp and the Heritage Lodge of the Jao Tsung-I Academy. They can provide 150 units in total. In view of the rapid development of the outbreak, including the recent successive occurrence of local infection cases, coupled with the increasing proportion of close contact persons among confirmed cases and the immediate evacuation for the purpose of disease investigation of infection cases, the usage rate of the quarantine centres is very high. As at 9am on February 18, over 80 per cent of the units of the four quarantine centres were in use.

In view of the development of the outbreak, the Government has endeavoured to look for more suitable sites and set up quarantine facilities in full steam. In view of the latest development, it is estimated that the Chun Yeung Estate in Fo Tan will soon commence operation as a quarantine centre, providing more than a thousand quarantine units in total. In addition, the Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre (JPC Centre) in Pat Heung, Yuen Long can be used as a quarantine centre shortly. On the other hand, we have been constructing additional units at the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and the JPC Centre respectively, providing some additional 600 units in total. The relevant works are expected to be completed within April.

At the same time, the Government continues to look for other suitable sites for setting up more quarantine facilities. Among others, we will make use of a piece of Government land of four hectares at Penny's Bay to provide at least 600 quarantine units. In addition, we are following up with the Walt Disney Company which has agreed to explore the use of another site at Penny's Bay reserved for future tourism development for constructing quarantine facilities.

As regards isolation facilities, as at noon on February 18, public hospitals were using about 937 isolation beds with an utilisation rate of about 30 per cent. In response to the changes in the situation, the Hospital Authority is carrying out internal alteration work at the Infectious Disease Centre of Princess Margaret Hospital to provide more isolation wards.

Thank you, President.

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# Subsidy rate of financial assistance for candidates and election expenses limits for LegCo election

The Chief Executive in Council has on February 11, 2020, made the Legislative Council Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 5) Order 2020 in accordance with section 83A of the Legislative Council Ordinance (Cap. 542) to increase the subsidy rate of the financial assistance for candidates of Legislative Council (LegCo) elections and also the Maximum Amount of Election Expenses (Legislative Council Election) (Amendment) Regulation 2020 under section 45 of the Elections (Corrupt and Illegal Conduct) Ordinance (Cap. 554) to increase the election expenses limits (EELs) for LegCo elections. Both pieces of subsidiary legislation will be published in the Gazette on February 21.

A government spokesman said today (February 19) that after the above pieces of subsidiary legislation have come into effect, starting from the 2020 LegCo General Election, the subsidy rate of financial assistance for candidates of LegCo elections would be increased from \$14 per vote to \$15 per vote, while the EELs for geographical constituencies (GCs) and functional constituencies (FCs) would be increased to the following amounts:

	GCs	EELs
(a)	Hong Kong Island	\$2,661,000
(b)	Kowloon East	\$1,996,000
(c)	Kowloon West	\$1,996,000
(d)	New Territories East	\$3,326,000
(e)	New Territories West	\$3,326,000

	FCs	EELs
(f)	Heung Yee Kuk, Agriculture and Fisheries, Insurance, and Transport FCs	\$133,000
(g)	Traditional FCs other than those in (f) above:	
	(i) Traditional FCs with not more than 5 000 registered electors	\$213,000
	(ii) Traditional FCs with 5 001 to 10 000 registered electors	\$425,000



(h)	District Council (second) FC	\$7,602,000
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"The upward adjustment of the subsidy rate is based on the estimated cumulative inflation rate from 2017 to 2020 (i.e. 9.6 per cent). The EEL adjustments also took into account the estimated cumulative inflation rate over the same period and the declared election expenses of the contested candidates in the last LegCo General Election, as well as other relevant considerations," the spokesman said.

The two pieces of subsidiary legislation implementing the said adjustments will be tabled at the Legislative Council on February 26 for negative vetting.