

Special traffic arrangements for race meeting in Sha Tin tomorrow

Police advise motorists that special traffic arrangements will be implemented in Sha Tin to facilitate the race meeting tomorrow (January 27).

The arrangements will come into effect two hours before the start of the first race and will last until the crowds have dispersed after the race meeting.

Appropriate traffic signs will be put up and police will be on hand to guide motorists.

The Police also appeal to people going to Sha Tin Racecourse for the race meeting and to Happy Valley Racecourse for cross betting to make maximum use of public transport.

Parking spaces at the two racecourses are available only to holders of appropriate permits issued by Hong Kong Jockey Club and any vehicles illegally parked will be towed away.

Key statistics on service demand of A&E Departments and occupancy rates in public hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

During the winter surge, the Hospital Authority is closely monitoring the service demand of Accident and Emergency Departments and the occupancy rates in public hospitals. Key service statistics are being issued daily for public information. Details are in the appended table.

CE announces activation of Emergency Response Level in relation to novel

coronavirus infection

In response to the latest development of the novel coronavirus infection, the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, yesterday (January 25) announced that the response level under the "Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance" (the Preparedness and Response Plan) would be raised to Emergency Response Level with immediate effect. She also rolled out a package of measures to tackle the disease and appealed to every member of public in Hong Kong to work together to fight against the virus.

"The development of the novel coronavirus infection is ever evolving and the situation is very serious, prompting tremendous public health concern and anxiety of the people. I have held a high-level meeting within the Government and listened to the advice of experts. I decided to raise the response level to Emergency and implement a series of strategies and measures as an all-out effort to tackle the disease," Mrs Lam said.

The strategies and measures announced by Mrs Lam today covered six areas.

(1) Enhancing mechanism and organisation structure to tackle disease

Mrs Lam announced that the response level under the Preparedness and Response Plan would be raised to Emergency level and she will chair a Steering Committee cum Command Centre with a view to formulating relevant strategies and measures according to the development of the disease as soon as possible. There are four Workgroups under the Steering Committee cum Command Centre. The Workgroup on Disease Prevention and Control led by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, is responsible for formulating strategies to manage infected cases and maintaining close liaison with relevant departments in the Mainland and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Workgroup on Responses and Actions led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, will co-ordinate the work of various departments in fighting the disease. The Workgroup on Public Participation led by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, will encourage the community to take part in activities to tackle the virus. The Workgroup on Communications led by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, will make sure that the latest and accurate messages are conveyed to all members of the public and stakeholders speedily and effectively.

An expert advisory group will be set up under the Steering Committee cum Command Centre to provide professional advice to the Chief Executive and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government. Currently four experts with rich experiences in public health, epidemiology and clinical aspect have been engaged to join the expert advisory group, including Professor Gabriel Leung, Dean of Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong; Professor Keiji Fukuda, Director and Clinical

Professor of the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong and former Assistant Director General of the WHO; Professor Yuen Kwok-yung, Chair of Infectious Diseases, Department of Microbiology, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong; and Professor David Hui Shu-cheong, Stanley Ho Professor of Respiratory Medicine and Director of Stanley Ho Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases.

(2) Strengthening immigration control

Given that all the current confirmed cases are imported ones, the HKSAR Government has decided to enhance immigration control to prevent the spreading of the disease. Specific measures in this aspect include:

(i) indefinitely suspending flight and high-speed train services to and from Wuhan of the Hubei Province;

(ii) expanding the arrangements of health declaration by in-coming travellers from the Mainland as soon as possible to all boundary control points, including the China Ferry Terminal, Hong Kong Macau Ferry Terminal, Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal, Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, Ocean Terminal, all land-based control points, in addition to the Airport and West Kowloon Station of the Express Rail Link (XRL), and to gradually pilot the use of e-health declaration system;

(iii) enhancing the manpower for conducting temperature checks and stationing at Border Control Points;

(iv) exploring temperature checks for departing passengers with priority on passengers departing to Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Macao;

(v) updating travel health advice and advising the general public not to visit Hubei Province in which there is community transmission of novel coronavirus; and

(vi) suspending all the Mainland exchanges, visits, cultural and sports activities organised by the HKSAR Government.

(3) Minimising risks of virus infection and spreading in local community

Although there is no local infection case at the moment, the HKSAR Government will cancel large-scale events in the coming future which it organises or arranges and are expected to be attended by many people. Apart from the International Chinese New Year Carnival and the Lunar New Year Cup football tournament which have been cancelled earlier, lantern carnivals organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department will also be cancelled. The HKSAR Government has reached a consensus with the organiser of the Hong Kong Marathon that the event originally scheduled for February 9 will also be cancelled. In addition, as the HKSAR Government has to focus on fighting the disease, various types of Chinese New Year receptions hosted by the HKSAR Government, including the one hosted by the Chief Executive in the

Government House, will be cancelled. The HKSAR Government appeals to community groups to take public health risks into account in organising any event.

To lower the risk of disease transmission among students in schools, the HKSAR Government will extend the Chinese New Year holidays of secondary schools, primary schools, kindergartens, child care centres and special schools so that they will resume classes on February 17. During the original school days, all of them will keep their school premises open and arrange a suitable number of staff to take care of students in need and continue to handle school matters. As for other schools, including post-secondary institutions, the Education Bureau will maintain liaison with them so as to strengthen anti-epidemic measures.

The Social Welfare Department has written to organisations operating subsidised social welfare services, including residential care home and day care centre services, providing them with additional resources to facilitate the cleaning and disinfection of the premises of their service units as well as reminding them to conduct body temperature checks for residents, working staff and visitors. Various Government departments will also step up the cleaning work in public facilities under their purview, including public markets, libraries, playgrounds, swimming pools, etc. Some children's play rooms may even be closed. The HKSAR Government has also reminded public transport operators and private property management companies to step up cleaning work to prevent the disease from spreading and protect public health.

(4) Enhancing personal hygiene of the public

The Centre for Health Protection has issued guidelines reminding citizens to be aware of personal hygiene. The HKSAR Government will proactively increase the supply of masks to ensure sufficient supply to public organisations and facilitate citizens to purchase masks. To meet the future demand for masks in Hong Kong, the Government and suppliers would work together to strive for restoring stable supply in short term. Besides maintaining close contact with the suppliers, the Chief Executive has personally written to the State Council seeking their assistance in mask supply from the Mainland to Hong Kong. Furthermore, the HKSAR Government will closely monitor the market supply of other hygiene products such as hand sanitizer, alcohol-based handrub and bleach, and will speed up the procurement process as far as possible to ensure adequate supply for government departments in meeting the practical needs of anti-epidemic efforts.

(5) Improving anti-epidemic facilities and services

Among the two quarantine facilities, Lady MacLehose Holiday Village has been officially activated to receive persons who are required to be quarantined and Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village is also ready. To cope with the quarantine need in future, the Department of Health is contacting

other non-governmental organisations to borrow or requisition their holiday villages, and coordinating with the Housing Department to convert Fai Ming Estate, an unoccupied public estate in Fanling, into temporary flats for quarantine and observation of close contact persons without symptoms if needed. Healthcare staff in need may also be accommodated there.

To further enhance port health measures, the Department of Health has put in place additional thermal imaging systems in the Hong Kong International Airport and Hong Kong West Kowloon Station of the XRL for checking body temperature of travellers with increased frequency of random checking.

The Hospital Authority (HA) has been closely monitoring the development. Our current strategy is, through "early notification", "early isolation" and "early testing", identify as soon as possible patients suspected to be infected and arrange them to receive isolation treatment in hospitals, with a view to preventing transmission into the community. At present, 603 isolation beds are ready for use in the public hospitals with occupancy of around 40 per cent. The HA and hospitals in all clusters will continue to keep a close watch on the situation and allocate resources to mobilise the other isolation beds when required. Regarding testing in public hospitals, the HA expects that rapid testing could be provided in laboratories of public hospitals in early February the soonest. The Public Health Laboratory Centre of the Department of Health has enhanced testing service with a view to ascertaining whether a patient is infected as soon as possible.

In addition, the HA is ready to activate designated clinics timely if there is community outbreak in Hong Kong or neighbouring region (e.g. Guangdong Province), to support the hospitals in handling a higher number of suspected cases or follow-up action in order to alleviate the pressure on Accident and Emergency Departments (AEDs). Designated clinics would generally be responsible for handling mild cases, such that AEDs could focus on the more severe cases.

(6) Allocating sufficient resources for the strategies and measures

To ensure effective implementation of the above strategies and measures, Mrs Lam emphasised that the HKSAR Government would render full financial support in meeting any additional resources reasonably required by government departments, the HA and organisations undertaking related studies in the tertiary institutions, so long as they contribute to anti-epidemic efforts.

"The HKSAR Government has always taken public health as the paramount consideration. We will closely monitor the development of the situation and seek expert advice. We will not hesitate to introduce more measures when necessary to protect the health of the citizens. I appeal to the public to work together with the HKSAR Government in fighting the disease," Mrs Lam said.

Rioters throw hard objects at police vehicle in Mong Kok

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following message as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

Large crowds gathered in the vicinity of Portland Street and Nathan Road outside Langham Place in Mong Kok last night (January 25). Some rioters blocked roads with miscellaneous objects and trash. Police swiftly conducted dispersal operation at scene. At around 11pm yesterday, rioters damaged and hurled hard objects at a police vehicle on Portland Street. In the face of the situation, Police used tear gas to disperse rioters. Police warn the rioters to stop all illegal acts immediately.

Transcript of remarks of press conference on measures against novel coronavirus infection

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on measures against novel coronavirus infection on January 25. Also joining were 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. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: The Government has identified the first highly suspected case on the 22nd. On the 23rd, you were in Davos and on the 24th you spent a day travelling back. And on today you rolled out a basket of measures against the spread of the virus in Hong Kong. Could they not have been implemented in your absence, given some of them were actually suggested by local academics and experts before you arrived in Hong Kong? Could they not be put in place earlier? Second, why set up this expert panel when the advice given by renowned microbiologist and medical experts in Hong Kong such as to roll out

more health declaration forms in all ports and then stepping up your contingency plan level has been made days before you arrived back in Hong Kong and were not answered by your government. So why set up this expert panel if you're not going to listen to them? And also on the mask ban, is the Government going to continue its appeal on the court's ruling that the anti-mask law is unconstitutional given that the novel coronavirus has reached Hong Kong? Why has the Government not made an official appeal to people to wear masks in public? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Of the three questions, first of all, it has lasted for about slightly more than three weeks now, throughout the process we have been taking forward our actions in a very systematic manner based on scientific evidence and advice from the experts. I would dispute your allegation that we have not been listening to the experts. Professor Chan has been meeting with the experts, Dr Constance Chan has been meeting with the experts almost on a daily basis to take their advice. But what has happened is we reached a critical point on the January 23 when there were two confirmed cases of this novel coronavirus. At each stage the Government's actions and reactions have to take into account the latest development, the severity of the public health situation and the advice that we receive from our experts. I thought that was a very simple sequence of events. There was absolutely no intention or plan to delay actions because of other non-health reasons. And it also has nothing to do with my absence from Hong Kong because despite my physical absence, I've been keeping in close contact with the Chief Secretary and the Secretary for Food and Health. I hope that we will see this in a very rational way.

The second point is about the experts. As I said, the experts have always been there to help us in providing the scientific evidence, the analysis and advice. But there are advice that maybe you will regard that we could not implement immediately because there are operational issues that we have to make sure before we could implement it. To have large numbers of health declaration forms in all the border control points could pose problem. That's why at the same time the health authorities together with the support of the Innovation and Technology Bureau have now put on a trial run of doing this electronically, so we are in a better position as a government to assure the people of Hong Kong that when we introduce a measure we are able to do it, despite not immediately but we have plans to implement that particular measure. And we will continue to listen to the experts. The reason that the Chief Executive has appointed an expert panel is because, as I said, we have reached another higher level of emergency and in order to shorten the distance between the communication of the experts with the highest authority in Hong Kong to make that decision, I think it is a very good idea for me to have direct access and for the experts to have direct access, when they have discovered something that they should immediately bring to my attention.

I understand that this higher level access of an expert advisory panel is also a recommendation from Professor Yuen Kwok-yung given to me actually earlier today. I'm sure that with that sort of communication we will be able to deal with the ever-evolving situation of this virus more effectively.

The court ruling has nothing to do with this public health plan, but I would just explain that the appeal against the court decision was not so much on the anti-mask regulation made under the ERO, it was an appeal to make sure that there is still this constitutional validity of the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, because for any government, for the executive not to have any powers of that sort could in a way impede us in responding to emergency situation. I am afraid I will stop here because the case is still in a judicial process although the court hearing has taken place so I have said a little bit more commenting on this case, but I really don't think I should go further into a case that is now before the court.

Reporter: Chief Executive, why is your government 48 hours behind the first highly suspected case to realise that you need to get ahead of the epidemic? The second question is how many Mainland Chinese visitors have entered Hong Kong since the Hong Kong Government got a report of the novel coronavirus from Mainland China, and how many of the patients being treated in public hospitals or under monitor or isolation in public hospitals are actually Mainland Chinese visitors or visitors from Wuhan specifically? If such influx of visitors are going to continue, how is your strategy of containment going to work? And the third question is, earlier today there is local report that at the Sha Tau Kok checkpoint, the immigration officer actually allowed a Mainland Chinese man with fever to enter Hong Kong. Can the Government confirm there is such a case? And if science has told us that patients at the early stage of the disease might have mild or even no symptoms, how is the current monitoring strategy going to work, because you are mainly looking at fever? Three questions, thank you.

Chief Executive: I have no details about the Sha Tau Kok case. I just checked my colleagues whether they know anything about this. No, we don't have any information about the Sha Tau Kok case. But what you have described is perhaps the difficulties we are facing in dealing with this virus, because the symptoms may be mild or even invisible at the beginning of the onset. That's why I appeal to all of us that we should all do our part to help in the containment of this rather tricky virus.

As far as the timing, I have explained that in the whole process, since receiving notification, we were very much on the alert. At every stage of the situation we implemented measures with a view to contain and arrest the situation from being deteriorating. Similarly, when the first two cases were confirmed in the evening of January 23, the Chief Secretary for Administration has already hosted a press conference to announce some of the measures that we are going to put in place. Following continuous monitoring and discussions with the experts this morning and amongst our own colleagues, we came up with another package of the strategy with the detailed proposals. You will notice that some are actually enhancement to existing things that we have been doing in light of the situation and the resources that we wish to put into these measures. I wouldn't say that this is a delay, because the situation is evolving and we are putting in the best responses to control the spread of the virus.

As far as the number of patients being treated in isolation facilities,

I don't know whether Dr Ko has any information on that and the overall workload on the public hospitals. But I remember Dr Ko has already described in detail the various contingency measures that the Hospital Authority will implement in order to free up more capacity to deal with patients that require to be monitored or be treated in this public health incident.

Chief Executive of Hospital Authority: Because one of the notification criteria of patients who are admitted, being notified and also tested, is that they have been visiting Wuhan. All the patients that we have notified have history of visiting Wuhan. Up to 12 pm today, we have accumulative of 305 cases who fulfil the criteria, and all of these cases have history of visiting Wuhan. And of course we are concerned and we are closely monitoring the epidemiology evolvement because the notification criteria may have to be readjusted according to how the infection is going to change. And accordingly, as mentioned by the Chief Executive, we are doing works to increase our isolation beds and also laboratory and the related capability so that if more patients need to be treated and isolated, we will have the capability to do so.

Reporter: (inaudible)

Chief Executive of Hospital Authority: In treating these patients, our main concern is their epidemiological link, whether they have visited Wuhan or not. We treat and manage these cases in the same manner.

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