

LCQ6: Vaccination against the Coronavirus Disease 2019

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

With the continuous rise in the number of people vaccinated against the Coronavirus Disease 2019 globally, the governments of various places have introduced "vaccine passports" one after another, with a view to resuming cross-border travel and restarting the economy. Regarding vaccination, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has considered introducing vaccine passports when the local vaccination rate has reached a specified level, and discussing with the governments of various places mutual recognition of vaccine passports to exempt travellers who have been vaccinated from entry quarantine; if so, of the details;
- (2) given the emergence of local confirmed cases recently involving virus variants, whether it has studied the efficacy of the two vaccines currently provided by the Government in preventing infections with virus variants; of the progress of its study on the procurement of second-generation vaccines; and
- (3) given that many members of the public are still hesitant towards vaccination, what new measures the Government has put in place to encourage members of the public to receive vaccination?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

- (1) As of yesterday, more than 1.1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered worldwide, equal to 15 doses for every 100 people. With vaccination programmes being implemented in different places, and gradual publishing of clinical user statistics as well as immunisation responses, we can obtain more information on the efficacy and quality of various COVID-19 vaccines. The SAR Government has been closely monitoring the vaccination certification, recognition and verification arrangements of individual places, countries and economies, and have been considering vaccination as a criteria to reduce quarantine. Arrangements regarding "vaccination passport" requires discussions between the governments of different places, and factors

such as epidemic development, health control and prevention measures, and vaccination progress of the relevant places, etc. will be taken into consideration.

As vaccination rates around the world are rapidly increasing, we note that some places are considering or have announced the reduction or lifting of quarantine for vaccinated persons. The SAR Government has also announced that considering that the epidemic situation in certain places have stabilised and pose lower public health risks, with reference to the "vaccine bubble" concept, it will adjust the quarantine arrangements for persons who have stayed in overseas places other than extremely high-risk and very high-risk places. The basic boarding and quarantine requirements will remain unchanged for high-risk and medium-risk places (i.e. Group B and Group C specified places), but the Government will supplement in due course new arrangements applicable to fully vaccinated persons and shorten the compulsory quarantine period for the relevant persons from 21 days to 14 days under the "vaccine bubble" concept. As for low-risk Group D specified places (i.e. Singapore, Australia and New Zealand), the compulsory quarantine period for fully vaccinated persons will also be correspondingly shortened from 14 days to seven days in due course under the "vaccine bubble" concept. Persons who have completed quarantine under the adjusted Group B, Group C and Group D requirements will be required to self-monitor for seven days and undergo compulsory testing after their shortened quarantine.

The SAR Government is now implementing the vaccination programme at full speed. A higher vaccination rate will give us better leverage to negotiate with other places the arrangements for resumption of cross-boundary travel.

(2) There were several mutant variant strains circulating globally, including the variants that first emerged in the United Kingdom (B.1.1.7), in South Africa (B.1.351) and in Brazil (P.1). In general, studies have shown that the existing vaccines works well against the non-variant, and the effectiveness data against variants differ by vaccines. With regards to the two types of COVID-19 vaccines provided in Hong Kong, the BioNTech vaccine is effective against B.1.1.7 and P.1, but is less effective against B.1.351. For the Sinovac vaccine, the drug manufacturer concerned is currently implementing a large scale study in Brazil and more efficacy data against variants will be available. Regarding the first local case of infection with unknown source involving a mutant virus strain, the two authorised vaccines in Hong Kong are still effective in vitro testing against the two mutant viruses detected in the relevant case. In view of the higher transmissibility of mutant strains, we urge the public to get vaccinated without delay.

The quantity of vaccines procured by the Government and to be supplied this year is sufficient for meeting our goal to provide vaccines for the majority of the population within this year. On the other hand, we have started to consider procuring the next generation COVID-19 vaccines, with a view to planning for the next phase of vaccination programme in Hong Kong. We hope that the next generation vaccines can have better efficacy in terms of protection. The protection power of the vaccines against mutant virus strains is also an important factor for us when considering to authorise and procure

COVID-19 vaccines in the future. Although we cannot predict with certainty when the next generation vaccines will be available, we have started to discuss with vaccine manufacturers from various places to provide Hong Kong with the next generation vaccine with stronger protection powers against mutant virus strains, with a view to supporting our next phase of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

(3) The Government has adjusted various social distancing measures with "vaccine bubble" as the basis. In respect of catering business, we have provided four types of mode of operation for eateries, under which the operation restrictions on the relevant premises would be relaxed subject to whether their staff and customers have received COVID-19 vaccination and the use of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application. Moreover, six types of premises (viz. bars or pubs, bathhouses, party rooms, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments and mahjong-tin kau premises) may also resume operation in a gradual manner on the premise that their staff and/or customers must receive COVID-19 vaccination and customers must use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application. We have also relaxed the restrictions in relation to group gatherings, including wedding ceremonies, religious gatherings and business meetings held in order to comply with any Ordinance or other regulatory instrument such as annual general meetings on the premise that their participants must have received at least the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Group gatherings of not more than 30 persons each during tours may also resume operation on the premise that their frontline staff must have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

The Government will closely monitor the progress of the vaccination programme and the implementation of the "vaccine bubble", and having regard to the development of the epidemic, timely adjust the relevant measures.

Thank you, President.

[LCQ2: Safety of food imported from Japan](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-kin and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

The Japanese Government announced last month that it would start discharging diluted nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea in two years from now. The governments of its neighbouring countries have raised objection one after another, denouncing

such a move to be detrimental to the agriculture and fisheries industry and hazardous to human health. Some environmental groups have pointed out that the radioactive substances in the nuclear wastewater such as tritium, strontium, cesium and carbon-14 will seriously affect the marine ecosystem and make their way into the human body through the food chain. Regarding safety of food imported from Japan, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will take follow-up actions in response to the decision of the Japanese Government, including gaining an understanding from it of the details of the arrangements for the discharge of nuclear wastewater, and requesting it to provide samples of the nuclear wastewater for testing of radiation levels, so as to grasp the information needed for formulating corresponding plans; if so, of the details;

(2) whether it will, upon the commencement of the discharge of nuclear wastewater into the sea, immediately and comprehensively enhance the testing of radiation levels of the agricultural and fisheries products imported from Japan; and

(3) given that the import of fruits, vegetables, milk, milk beverages and milk powder produced in Fukushima into Hong Kong is currently prohibited, whether the Government will consider, in light of the latest situation, imposing a blanket import ban on all food items produced in Fukushima and its neighbouring areas when necessary, in order to safeguard public health?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Wong Kwok-kin is set out below:

The Japanese Government announced earlier the decision to discharge the wastewater generated in the cooling process of the reactors at the Fukushima nuclear power station into the ocean in about two years' time (i.e. 2023). The plan has aroused international and public concern. According to the announcement, the nuclear wastewater will be purified and diluted to meet relevant international standards before being discharged.

The Tokyo Electric Power Company will formulate a detailed plan for discharging the wastewater into the ocean. Implementation of the plan, which must be in line with international practices and standards, has to be approved by the Japanese Government first. Besides, the Japanese authorities have indicated that they will closely monitor the impact of the discharge on the environment and the ocean, and will keep the international community and the public notified of necessary information in a transparent manner.

Since the wastewater contains various radionuclides, we understand that many organisations, fishery operators and members of the public are concerned that the discharge of wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power station into the ocean would have serious impact on marine ecosystem, the food chain

and food safety. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has expressed grave concern about the impact of the discharge plan on food safety, and has strongly requested the Japanese authorities to provide data from various aspects and information on control and surveillance, including the method and actual location of the wastewater discharge, the list and the concentration of the radionuclides in the wastewater, the frequency and volume of discharge, as well as the monitoring programme on the wastewater treatment and the surrounding environment. The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) have made it clear to the Japanese authorities that they shall provide all relevant information, formulate and promulgate a highly transparent and robust surveillance programme including the measures and locations of monitoring at source, the radionuclides and types of food under surveillance, ways for release of surveillance results and contingency mechanisms, etc., and should not discharge the nuclear wastewater unilaterally without the consensus of the international community.

Currently, the import of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from Fukushima is still prohibited in Hong Kong. Radiation certificate has to be produced for the import of game, meat, poultry, poultry eggs and aquatic products from Fukushima and its four neighbouring prefectures (i.e. Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma), whereas radiation certificate and exporter certificate are required for the import of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from the four prefectures. The CFS implemented additional control and surveillance measures in 2011 for food products imported from Japan. Since then, the CFS had tested a total of more than 750 000 samples of such products and none of the samples were found to have radiation levels exceeding the guideline levels of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The CFS will continue to adopt a risk-based principle in conducting radiation tests on Japanese food products under its routine Food Surveillance Programme.

Regarding the Japanese Government's plan to discharge wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power station into the ocean, the HKSAR Government has requested the Japanese authorities to provide data from various aspects and information on control and surveillance. We will carefully examine the information provided by the Japanese authorities and the assessments made by international expert organisations, etc., and conduct risk assessments with the relevant Government departments as appropriate to determine whether monitoring work on Japanese food should be adjusted accordingly and whether additional measures are required to ensure food safety and safeguard public health. Depending on the circumstances, we will not rule out increasing the tests on Japanese food imports and tightening import control on food products (including fishery and agricultural products) from Fukushima and its neighbouring areas.

It is only through disclosure of all relevant information comprehensively, including the rationale for discharging the wastewater into the ocean, the associated health and ecological risks, intervention measures available, and whether there is a highly transparent surveillance mechanism to ensure effective operation of such measures as well as effective

safeguarding of the ecosystem and food safety, that public's doubts and worries arising from the discharge of the wastewater can be eliminated. Otherwise, the confidence of the public in imported Japanese food would be undermined. Hence, the Japanese authorities shall disseminate all information relating to the nuclear wastewater discharge plan of the Fukushima nuclear power station to the international community and the public in a highly transparent manner. It was understood that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has proposed to set up a technical working group to follow up and monitor Japan's discharge of the nuclear wastewater. The China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs remarked that the IAEA has confirmed it would invite experts from China to join the proposed technical working group. We will keep a close watch on the assessments made by relevant international organisations on the discharge plan. The FHB and the CFS have relayed to the Japanese authorities that they should not discharge the wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power station into the ocean unilaterally without the consensus of the international community so as to avoid bringing about irreversible impacts on the environment.

Thank you, President.

LC: Speech by CS for proposed resolutions under Criminal Procedure Ordinance and Coroners Ordinance

Following is the speech (translated from Chinese) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, for the proposed resolutions under the Criminal Procedure Ordinance and the Coroners Ordinance in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

President,

I move that the first Resolution standing in my name on the Agenda be passed to seek the approval of the Legislative Council for the Criminal Procedure (Witnesses' Allowances) (Amendment) Rules 2021 made by the Criminal Procedure Rules Committee under section 9B of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance. I will also shortly be moving the second Resolution standing in my name be passed to seek the approval of the Legislative Council for the Coroners (Witnesses' Allowances) (Amendment) Rules 2021 made by the Chief Justice under section 54 of the Coroners Ordinance.

At present, the maximum allowance payable to ordinary witnesses in criminal proceedings and coroners' inquests is \$575 for each day of attendance or \$285 for not exceeding four hours of attendance. The maximum allowance for professional and expert witnesses is higher, at \$3,065 for each

day of attendance or \$1,530 for not exceeding four hours of attendance.

Under the adjustment mechanism approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, changes to the rate of allowance for ordinary witnesses would be made in accordance with the movements in the overall Median Monthly Employment Earnings of Employees (MMEE) in Hong Kong while those for professional and expert witnesses would be made in accordance with the changes in the mid-point salary of a Government Medical and Health Officer. The Finance Committee has also delegated the authority to approve the relevant adjustments to the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (SFST).

The existing rates of allowances were set in January 2020 based on the biennial review conducted in 2018. The Judiciary Administration (JA) reviewed the rates of allowances in 2020. Taking into account the movements in the overall MMEE and the mid-point salary of a Government Medical and Health Officer from the third quarter of 2018 to the third quarter of 2020, the JA proposed and the SFST approved to increase the maximum rate of allowance for ordinary witnesses from \$575 to \$615 for each day of attendance and from \$285 to \$305 for not exceeding four hours of attendance. For professional and expert witnesses, the maximum rate of allowance would be increased from \$3,065 to \$3,210 for each day of attendance and from \$1,530 to \$1,600 for not exceeding four hours of attendance. These adjustments aim to maintain the real value of the rates of allowances to minimise any financial loss suffered by members of the public testifying as witnesses in courts.

President, the Criminal Procedure (Witnesses' Allowances) (Amendment) Rules 2021 and the Coroners (Witnesses' Allowances) (Amendment) Rules 2021 seek to implement the new rates of allowances. I invite Members to approve the two Resolutions. Thank you, President.

[US Dollar Liquidity Facility tender result](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

US Dollar Liquidity Facility tender result:

Tender date	: May 5, 2021 (Wednesday)
Settlement date	: May 6, 2021 (Thursday)
Repayment date	: May 13, 2021 (Thursday)
Tenor	: Seven Days
Amount applied	: Nil

Amount allotted : Nil
Lowest interest rate accepted : Nil
Highest interest rate accepted : Nil

CHP investigates six additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, May 5, the CHP was investigating six additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 11 797 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 11 796 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, three are imported cases and one is a local case with unknown sources, while the remaining two are epidemiologically linked with local cases.

The local case with unknown sources involves a 46-year-old woman (case number: 11793) who was asymptomatic. She is a domestic helper. In accordance with a compulsory testing notice, she underwent testing at a Community Testing Centre on May 3 and tested positive.

Another reported case today involving a 38-year-old woman (case number: 11797), who is also a domestic helper, is epidemiologically linked with case 11793.

A further analysis conducted by Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the DH revealed that both cases 11793 and 11797 involved N501Y mutant strain of higher transmissibility, the CHP decided to carry out prudent measures on infection control and prevention to stop the potential risk of spread of N501Y mutant strain. The CHP will, in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A), transfer asymptomatic residents of all units on all floors of the building (involving around 230 units and 30 units separately) where the patients resided (Block N2 of Kornhill in Quarry Bay and Royalton in Pok Fu Lam) to quarantine centres; symptomatic residents will be sent to the hospital for treatment. They will undergo compulsory quarantine for 21 days.

A total of 87 cases have been reported in the past 14 days (April 21 to May 4), including 15 local cases (including 1 possibly local) of which five are from unknown sources.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing

information, please see the Annex or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited specified venues under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid testing according to the compulsory testing notice. The Regulation also requires all household members of close contacts of confirmed cases to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test within a specified period according to compulsory testing notices published in the Gazette. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop and undergo testing as soon as possible.

The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

The CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The spokesman said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps). After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.