

HAD sternly clarifies unfounded allegation made by SSPDC member Ramon Yuen

In response to the unfounded allegation made by the Sham Shui Po District Council (SSPDC) member, Mr Ramon Yuen Hoi-man, against the SSPDC Secretariat, a spokesman of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) today (March 16) sternly clarified as follows:

It is specified in section 61 of the District Councils Ordinance (the Ordinance) (Cap. 547) that functions of a District Council (DC) are to, inter alia, advise the Government on district administration affairs and where funds are made available for the purpose, to promote community, recreational and cultural activities and environmental improvement projects, within the district. All items for discussion and papers of DC must be compatible with the DC functions specified in the Ordinance.

When handling DC affairs, District Offices will consult the relevant bureaux and departments, to examine whether an item for discussion is compatible with the DC functions specified in section 61 of the Ordinance. If an item for discussion is found not compatible with the functions specified in the Ordinance, the Government will follow up accordingly, such as writing to the DC Chairman concerned about the problem and request the Chairman to follow up etc. If the DC concerned still keeps the items for discussion that are not compatible with the Ordinance, the DC Secretariat cannot provide secretariat support for these matters, including drafting minutes and uploading the relevant audio to the DC website etc., and secretariat staff or other government officers will neither attend the relevant parts of the meeting nor join the discussion of the relevant papers. This has been the established practice all along.

At the 4th meeting on June 23, 2020 and the 5th meeting on September 8, 2020, since some items for discussion raised by Members were not compatible with the DC functions as set out in the Ordinance, the SSPDC Secretariat, following the established practice, did not provide support for those items for discussion. The then District Officer (Sham Shui Po) had written to the DC Chairman informing him of the situation before the two meetings, and reiterated the Government's stance respectively at both meetings.

Prior to the 6th SSPDC Meeting on November 10, 2020, the SSPDC Secretariat prepared the minutes of the 4th and the 5th meetings according to the established practice, and the Members did not propose any amendments to the draft minutes at the meeting.

During the aforesaid meeting, Mr Yuen proposed to include "supplementary" paragraphs in the minutes on discussions in the 4th and the 5th DC Meeting which had been found not compatible with the DC Ordinance. The then District Officer (Sham Shui Po) had already pointed out that the SSPDC

Secretariat would not provide secretariat support for items not compatible with DC functions. The SSPDC Secretariat would not take any follow up actions in relation to the concerned records, even if the "supplementary" paragraphs had been passed by the DC. Therefore, the audio of relevant discussions was not uploaded to the DC website. Such approach is consistent with our practice as mentioned above.

In accordance with the same procedures, the SSPDC Secretariat circulated the draft minutes of the 6th meeting to Members before the 7th meeting held on February 23, 2021 for consideration. Members decided at the meeting to postpone discussing the draft minutes.

At today's meeting, the SSPDC Secretariat submitted the draft minutes of the 6th meeting for Members' consideration in accordance with the established procedures. All Members (including Mr Yuen) have a right to propose amendments to the draft at the meeting. Mr Yuen did not propose any amendments.

Mr Yuen did not propose to the SSPDC Secretariat any amendments to the draft during the past three weeks. We deeply regret that he instead chose to level an unfounded allegation today.

Government to gazette compulsory testing notice

The Government will exercise the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) and publish in the Gazette a compulsory testing notice, which requires any person who had been present at 22 specified premises during the specified period (persons subject to compulsory testing) to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test.

Currently, in all districts in Hong Kong, if one or more new confirmed cases are found in the residential buildings (including buildings for both commercial and residential uses), or there are sewage samples tested positive which implied possible infection risks, the buildings will be included in the compulsory testing notice.

For testing targeting at workplaces, if one or more confirmed cases are found in a workplace, it will be included in the compulsory testing notice.

Twenty-one premises fulfilling the above criteria and one school were included in the compulsory testing notice today (March 16).

Details of the compulsory testing notice are as follows:

1. Any person who had been present at any specified premises listed in Part A of Annex 1 for more than two hours at any time during the period from March 3 to March 16, 2021 (including but not limited to visitors, residents and workers), have to undergo testing by March 19, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing have previously undergone testing between March 14 and March 16, 2021, they would be taken to have complied with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notice.

2. Any person who had been present at any specified premises listed in Part B of Annex 1 for more than two hours at any time during the period from March 3 to March 16, 2021 (including but not limited to full-time, part-time and relief staff and visitors), have to undergo testing by March 19, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing have previously undergone testing between March 14 and March 16, 2021, they would be taken to have complied with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notice.

3. Any person who had been present at any specified premises listed in Part C of Annex 1 for more than two hours at any time during the period from March 3 to March 16, 2021 (including but not limited to full-time, part-time and relief staff, students and visitors), have to undergo testing by March 19, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing choose to undergo testing using the specimen bottles distributed by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP), they have to return the specimen bottle with the sample by March 21, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing have previously undergone testing between March 14 and March 16, 2021, they would be taken to have complied with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notice.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau reminds the public that in accordance with the compulsory testing notice issued earlier, all household members of close contacts are required to undergo compulsory testing. Any person who had lived with a person who is placed under quarantine pursuant to section 22 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A) (person under quarantine) in the same residential unit on the date of commencement of quarantine or during the 14 days before that day, and who becomes aware of the quarantine of the person under quarantine when the relevant quarantine has not yet been completed, have to undergo testing within two days of he/she becoming aware of the person under quarantine has been placed under quarantine and report to the Government the result of the test by phone (at 6275 6901), fax (at 2530 5872) or email (ct@csb.gov.hk) within three days of undergoing the test.

The Government will set up mobile specimen collection station at HSBC Main Building in Central tomorrow (March 17) for workers subject to compulsory testing. The service period of the mobile specimen collection stations at Li Sing Street Playground, Kennedy Town Playground and Sai Ying Pun Community Complex will be extended to March 19 (Friday).

The opening dates and operating hours of the mobile specimen collection stations in various districts providing free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing services for the general public are stated in Annex 2. Apart from mobile specimen collection stations, persons subject to compulsory testing can also

choose to attend any of the community testing centres in all districts to receive testing free of charge.

Persons subject to compulsory testing may choose to undergo testing via the following routes:

1. To visit any of the mobile specimen collection stations (see the list and target groups (if applicable) at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html) for testing;
2. To attend any of the community testing centres (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/);
3. To obtain a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 121 post offices, vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations or 47 designated general outpatient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority and return the specimen to one of the designated specimen collection points (see the distribution points and times, and the specimen collection points and times, at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);
4. To undergo testing at any of the GOPCs of the Hospital Authority as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority;
5. To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories which are recognised by the Department of Health (DH) and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories RTPCR.pdf); or
6. To use a specimen bottle distributed to the relevant specified premises by the CHP (if applicable), and return the specimen bottle with the sample collected as per relevant guidelines.

The spokesman cautioned that testing received at accident and emergency departments of the Hospital Authority or during hospital stays, or testing provided by private laboratories which cannot issue SMS notifications in respect of test results, does not comply with the requirements of the aforementioned compulsory testing notice.

"If persons subject to compulsory testing have symptoms, they should seek medical attention immediately and undergo testing as instructed by a medical professional. They should not attend the mobile specimen collection stations or the community testing centres."

Persons subject to compulsory testing must keep the SMS notification containing result of the test for checking by a law enforcement officer when the officer requires the persons to provide information about their undergoing the specified test.

Furthermore, persons subject to testing under the compulsory testing notices should, as far as reasonably practicable, take appropriate personal disease prevention measures including wearing a mask and maintaining hand hygiene, and, unless for the purpose of undergoing the specified test, stay at their place of residence and avoid going out until the test result is ascertained as far as possible.

Any enquiries on compulsory testing arrangements may be addressed to the hotline at 6275 6901, which operates daily from 9am to 6pm. If persons

subject to compulsory testing plan to conduct testing at any of the community testing centres, they can check the centre's appointment status in advance. The hotlines of the community testing centres are available at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/info/.

The Government will continue to trace possibly infected persons who had been to the relevant premises, and seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notices. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Relevant officers of different government departments are empowered to perform certain functions under the relevant Regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), including requesting individuals to provide information and assistance when necessary. Any person who fails to comply with the relevant request commits an offence and would be liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). Collection and use of any personal data for conducting COVID-19 tests must meet the requirements under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486). Government departments or testing service providers which handle the relevant information may provide the data to DH or other relevant departments for anti-epidemic purpose as necessary. The workflow does not involve the provision of any personal data to organisations or persons outside Hong Kong.

The spokesman said, "The Government urges all individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, or individuals with infection risks (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases), to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons."

Statistics for COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme has been implemented for 19 days since February 26.

In the past 24 hours ending at 8pm today (March 16), the following figures were recorded:

(i) About 10 200 persons received their first dose of Sinovac vaccine, including about 6 200 persons vaccinated at eight Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) and about 3 500 persons at private doctors and clinics

participating in the programme; and

(ii) About 13 000 persons received their first dose of BioNTech vaccine at 19 CVCs.

(iii) A total of about 23 200 persons received their first dose of vaccine.

The overall percentage of people who have received Sinovac vaccine at eight CVCs today is about 75 per cent, while the overall percentage of people who have received BioNTech vaccine at 19 CVCs today is about 93 per cent.

So far, a cumulative total of about 229 300 persons have received their first vaccination dose (Annex 1), with about 176 300 persons receiving Sinovac vaccine and about 53 000 persons receiving BioNTech vaccine.

As of 8pm today, about 30 800 persons had reserved their first and second doses of the Sinovac vaccine online in the past 24 hours, while about 113 200 persons had reserved their first and second doses of the BioNTech vaccine online.

In the past 24 hours ending at 0000 hours today, there were 11 cases of ambulance transfer to hospital. Among them, nine cases were discharged and two cases were admitted for observation (Annex 2).

Quarantine and isolation arrangement involving children

Concerning the quarantine and isolation arrangement for families involving young children and with members identified as close contacts and/or confirmed cases, a Government spokesman explained today (March 16) the policy and arrangement on these areas.

"Hong Kong has comprehensive and robust measures to combat COVID-19, which include quarantine and isolation where necessary, and these measures achieve to stabilise the recent wave of epidemic in safeguarding the well-being of our community as a whole. Yet, we also wish to emphasise that for cases where children are involved, each and every decision has been made in the interests of the children and their families," the spokesman said.

To ensure proper care of COVID-19 patients and to prevent further transmission, all confirmed COVID-19 patients are admitted to public hospitals and treatment facilities managed by the Hospital Authority (HA) for isolation and treatment. During some specific operations, preliminary positive cases would also be admitted to hospitals or medical facilities for early isolation and treatment. On the other hand, close contacts of confirmed

cases will be subject to 14-day quarantine at Government quarantine centres.

Close contact and quarantine arrangement

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) will perform epidemiological investigation and risk assessment to identify close contacts for reported cases. Close contacts in general are defined as those who have stayed or lived with the patient, or had face-to-face contact with a case without wearing a mask.

Under certain circumstances, such as at an outbreak situation where two or more confirmed cases are found within the same premises, or within an environment with higher risk (e.g. playing sports, doing exercise or staying in the same classroom or school hall for an extended period of time), contacts even if wearing a mask could also be considered as close contacts.

The Government operates six quarantine centres (QCs) for close contacts including four at government facilities, namely: the Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre, the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre; and two at hotels, namely Silka Tsuen Wan and Dorsett Kwun Tong.

Medical posts operating around the clock are set up at the four QCs in the government facilities, whereas mobile medical teams stand by at the two hotels.

Sending close contacts to QCs is considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account a number of factors, including whether there are special needs (e.g. minors, pregnant women), medical needs, distance between close contacts' residence and the QC, etc. Normally those requiring medical attention would be sent to one of the four QCs at government facilities where their health condition can be better monitored and supported in case of emergency.

For any child under age 18 to be quarantined in QCs, the Department of Health (DH) upon request would generally allow one of the parents to accompany their children to the QCs to take care of them. In such cases, the parent and the child would remain in the same room until the quarantine period ends.

If a parent tests positive and to be hospitalised, a caretaker arranged by the parents (who can be relatives, parents' adult friends or domestic helpers) could be allowed to accompany the quarantined child.

For parents classified as close contacts but would like to stay with their children with special needs who are not close contacts, the parent could make request to DH to bring their children to the QC. The children will need to stay with the parents for the whole quarantine period. The parents need to sign an undertaking that they fully understand the risk of infection.

To cater for specific needs of children (including babies), the Social

Welfare Department provides a wide range of items in the QCs available to minors, including cots, blankets, bumpers, clothes, cutlery, toiletries, diapers for children and babies, baby food and snacks, as well as colouring pencils and coloring books for children. Milk warmers, disinfectors for milk bottles and refrigerators for parents are also provided upon request. The DH and Civil Aid Service colleagues are doing their best to accommodate the needs for quarantined children, and make the QC environment as child-friendly as possible.

Isolation and treatment

Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world where confirmed COVID-19 patients, regardless of carrying symptoms or not, are admitted to public hospitals and treatment facilities for isolation and treatment. The HA has continued to enhance its capacity through activating Tier-2 isolation beds, and operating the Community Treatment Facility at AsiaWorld-Expo and North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre.

The HA fully understands the special needs of children, and has been striking a balance between infection control measures and the needs of patients. If parents or family members of a paediatric COVID-19 patient are also diagnosed with COVID-19, public hospitals will consider placing the patients in the same Airborne Infection Isolation Room, subject to assessment of the patients' clinical condition. In cases where the parents test negative, public hospitals will also accommodate their request to accompany the paediatric patient, subject to the agreement of the CHP of DH and the availability of isolation capacities.

The hospital will explain the risk of contracting the infection to the parents. Essential infection control precautions and personal protective equipment will be provided. Due to infection control consideration, the parents will be required to undergo an additional quarantine period under CHP after the paediatric patient is discharged.

In the scenario where both parents are confirmed with COVID-19 and there is no other better arrangement for providing care for their children, public hospitals will, upon the agreement of CHP, provide suitable arrangement to facilitate proper parental care.

"Controlling the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic and protecting the health of the whole of all Hong Kong population living and working in the city, including members of their families, is the prime concern of the Government," the spokesman said.

"If anyone in quarantine or isolation has any questions, requests or suggestions we have in place established procedures to ensure this can happen and that people's needs can be met as far as practicably and safely possible."

CS visits Community Vaccination Centres in Tuen Mun and Sham Shui Po (with video)

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, today (March 16) visited the Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) at Yau Oi Sports Centre in Tuen Mun and Lai Chi Kok Park Sports Centre in Sham Shui Po to be briefed on their operation and to give encouragement to their staff members.

Mr Cheung called on members of the public in the priority groups of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, especially those in the three new categories, to get vaccinated early.

Accompanied by the Director of General Grades of the Civil Service Bureau, Mr Hermes Chan, Mr Cheung was briefed by staff members who run the CVC at Yau Oi Sports Centre on the operation of the centre and by the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko, on the operation of the CVC at Lai Chi Kok Park Sports Centre. He took the opportunity to express his gratitude to the staff working there, including healthcare workers from both the public and private sectors and colleagues of various government departments.

Mr Cheung also chatted with people getting vaccinated at the two CVCs and thanked them for participating in the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme to help contain the epidemic.

The Government announced yesterday (March 15) that it would extend the scope of priority groups under the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme to cover the following three additional categories of people:

- (1) people aged between 30 and 59;
- (2) students aged 16 or above studying outside Hong Kong; and
- (3) domestic helpers.

Members of the public in these new categories can make reservations starting today through the online booking system on the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk) of the vaccination programme for receiving vaccines at CVCs and the 18 general out-patient clinics of the Hospital Authority. They can also make appointments for vaccination with a private doctor or clinic participating in the programme.

Meanwhile, 12 more CVCs for administering Comirnaty vaccine came into operation today to provide an enlarged vaccination quota to meet public demand. As of now, Hong Kong has eight CVCs administering Sinovac vaccine

while 19 CVCs are administering Comirnaty vaccine.

"So far, about 206 000 persons have received their first vaccination dose. However, we are concerned about the recent epidemic situation with confirmed cases of COVID-19 on the rise again. After expansion of the vaccination programme, the priority groups will cover more than 5.5 million people. I strongly appeal to people in the priority groups to get vaccinated as soon as possible in order to protect themselves and others and join hands to fight against the epidemic," Mr Cheung said.

The CVC at Yau Oi Sports Centre administering Sinovac vaccine is operated by a private medical organisation. The CVC at Lai Chi Kok Park Sports Centre administering Comirnaty vaccine is operated by the Hospital Authority.