

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (April 13):

Reporter: Three questions. Number one, what is the holdup with opening the vaccine for people under 30? Why is the incentive plan so complicated? Why not adapt something like in Israel, where they have green passes for vaccinated people? Second question, when do you expect vaccination level to hit 50 per cent or 70 per cent? And third question, how much longer are we talking about here for the travel bubble with Singapore, days or weeks? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The answer to the first question is a question of science. As soon as our experts, whether local experts or overseas experts, could confirm the safety, efficacy and quality of the two vaccines that we have authorised for emergency use are good for younger aged Hong Kong residents, then we will seriously consider it. Especially Hong Kong is relatively more fortunate in having a secured supply of vaccines that is adequate to cater for the whole population. So it's a question of science.

I don't think our so-called incentive plan is complicated. Every country, every place, has to design their incentives, or on a broader scale, their anti-COVID-19 strategy, taking into account the local context. The local context at this point in time is the vaccination rate is not very satisfactory – it's about eight per cent. I think (the vaccination rate in) Israel has gone up to 70, 80 or even 100 percent. That is a very relevant factor that one has to take into account in designing the incentives for people to take the vaccine. In our case we also have some sort of a pass. I don't know whether you have received the jab, if you have received the jab like me, then you can use the "iAM Smart". You can download your vaccination record – which date that you have taken the first dose and the second dose, and which vaccine that you have taken. It's all very clear on your phone. Whether you call it a certificate, an e-pass or what, we have all these measures and instruments in place. What we need now is to promote vaccination in Hong Kong. Since just protecting your own health and loving your family members are not strong enough incentive, then the Government has to come up with stronger incentives, which are important not only for promoting vaccination but also to allow Hong Kong to go back to normality in a gradual and orderly manner so that business could continue to operate.

For the second question about this vaccination rate, we have not committed to a particular vaccination rate in the community before something will happen, or as somebody called, a "herd immunity". I have a very enlightening session with my four experts last Friday, and the advice given to me is that instead of looking into a community-wide vaccination rate

target, we should promote individual vaccination by encouraging individuals, or groups of individuals, or venue-based category of individuals to take the jab and then create this "vaccine bubble" for them to enjoy some of the relaxed measures. At the moment we have no plan to commit to a particular vaccination rate. Of course, the more the merrier, if I may put it that way.

About the travel bubble with Singapore, Singapore is one of the target countries that we have very active discussion recently. One is because the situation in the two places is quite comparable. Second is there is a lot of travel between Hong Kong and Singapore whether it's for business, for leisure, for visiting friends and relatives. Third is we actually had a very concrete scheme, an air travel bubble in place, before the fourth wave hit us. What we need to do is to dig out that plan and to revisit that plan. For example in November, when we had that plan with Singapore, there was no reference whatsoever to vaccination. Now we are proposing to the Singaporean government that we would like our Hong Kong travellers to be fully vaccinated before they take on this air travel bubble. This is our suggestion to the Singaporean government, which they have no objection. It's actually enhanced safety, but they will not impose such a requirement on travellers from Hong Kong within this air travel bubble. I expect an early indication of agreement between the two sides so that we can tell the people of Hong Kong that it's time to travel to Singapore again.

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