

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (January 26):

Reporter: Firstly, about the issue on potential lockdowns in future like the one we saw on the weekend in Jordan. Can the Hong Kong citizens expect the scope would be smaller, when you mentioned that it could be just a street or several blocks, and the time would be shorter and the operation would be held confidential, before notice? And secondly, do you think it's time to beef up penalties for those who didn't take the mandatory testing at the first place – we saw some in Jordan and some in Laguna City as well that they didn't go tested it in the first place? And thirdly, can you explain why did you ask Beijing for the Sinopharm vaccine? Is there a need to ask for them for the vaccines? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. About the first question, actually I mentioned that shortly after this operation in Jordan, we have had a very quick wash-up to identify areas for improvement because it has proven to be an effective tool to help us to combat COVID-19, which means that the Hong Kong SAR Government will be ready to use it again when the situation warrants. It is always necessary to see whether we could do better in the next operation. As a result of that very quick wash-up, we have identified at least three areas that we could improve. One is in the announcement. For an operation like this, of course we would like to keep it strictly confidential until the operation commences. In this case, it should be 4am on Saturday but unfortunately, somehow, there was quite extensive leakage. In future we will have to decide how to ensure better confidentiality or if unfortunately, again, there was a leakage, whether we should come out earlier so as to calm people down because I still felt that if it was just an operation of two days, and with the necessary support and supplies given by the Government, maybe the residents will not be so nervous and decided to leave.

The second improvement measure is the scope, as you have put it. On this occasion, although everybody said it was a small district, but in Hong Kong, because of our density and our multi-storey buildings, this very small area actually has over 150 buildings now with 7 000 residents, which then means it's very difficult for us to conduct in a very efficient manner. The next thing we need to consider for the next operation is whether we could be more focused. We should do smaller-scale restriction-testing operations but we could do more at the same time. It could be one in this district, another one in another district, but the scale of each operation could be smaller.

The second is once we started the operation, how we could compress the

time so that the inconvenience to residents could be minimised. In compressing the time, we have to revisit each of the steps in the procedure, from arranging them to come down to testing to collating the specimens to send to the private laboratories, to getting the results out and then notifying the residents via SMS. All these will be revisited before the next operation.

The second question, enforcement is very important. It is part and parcel of any operation, whether it is the normal compulsory testing regime on a territory-wide basis, or under this restriction-testing, but we have to accept that Hong Kong's operation is under a very inefficient or insufficient framework because we don't have the data of the residents in each area. In the Mainland China, you have "hukou"; we don't have that so we don't know who are the residents living in a particular building, especially for private buildings. For public rental housing we have a better idea because of the Housing Department's record, but in the private buildings we actually don't know. What we could do is we go back to that building without notice and then we try to check everyone coming out of the building whether they have an SMS showing a negative result. If no, that means you have not complied, then we will take down your personal data and then pass to the Centre for Health Protection to consider issuing a summons, or where permissible, issue a fixed penalty ticket. There are two legislative regimes for us to take enforcement actions. We will continue to do that. But I really hope that we don't need to talk about enforcement. This is public health. This is for the benefit of the individuals, their family and also the whole district and the whole of Hong Kong. So please help us to promote compliance without resorting to enforcement.

About vaccines, we have been very concerned about the supply of vaccines for Hong Kong people, because this is really sort of the light at the end of a tunnel. Over many months, we have worked out advance purchase agreements with three manufacturers, actually we are still discussing a fourth in order to have at least one vaccine per technology. But the three vaccines that we have advance-purchased so far all have a little bit of hiccup, so to speak. For the one that has been authorised by the Secretary for Food and Health, that is the Fosun/BioNTech, it is now legally for use in Hong Kong but the supply will only come in end of February from Germany. The second is the Sinovac. Again, it has to be authorised and the supply has been delayed. The third is the AstraZeneca, which has always been a later supplier – towards the second part of the year. But at the same time we have some desperate need for vaccination amongst the high-risk group or amongst those cross-border workers. We have 10 000 truck drivers crossing the border every day and they have to take test every day. Now that we have a vaccine, there was a proposal put to us that they should be vaccinated as early as possible together with the Mainland truck drivers so that there could be greater assurance and safety. With those considerations in mind I triggered what I have been given to understand when I was in Beijing last November, that if there is a need in Hong Kong, then the Chief Executive could always approach the Central People's Government (CPG) for help in trying to secure a certain proportion of Mainland-developed or Mainland-produced vaccines to come to Hong Kong, and that's exactly what I have done. I'm sorry I could not disclose further

details because that would be pre-empting considerations and decisions by the CPG. But judging from what the CPG has been doing for us over the whole year of tackling COVID-19, they have always been very supportive, whether in providing us with face masks when they were still in shortage, helping us to take back Hong Kong people from Wuhan, from all over the world, and building this wonderful interim hospital for us, renovating the AWE (AsiaWorld-Expo) into isolation facilities and also helping us to do a Universal Community Testing Programme last September. I hope and I would continue to appeal to the CPG to give us support on the issue of vaccine supply.

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