

Transcript of remarks by S for Health on quarantine arrangements at media session

â€œFollowing is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, at a media session after attending a radio programme today (August 13):

Reporter: For inbound residents whose homes are spacious enough to quarantine at home for the first three days, why do they have to spend extra to quarantine in a hotel when the government already allows infected residents to isolate at home? Do you think that is unfair for them? My second question is, are you unwilling to do "0+7" or completely remove quarantine like the rest of the world? The international community wants to know, can we see "zero-quarantine" by the end of this year?

Secretary for Health: The first question is, there is a difference between local residents who tested positive and those who came from abroad. The fact is that local residents are already in the community and are already living in their home environment. There is a difference. Whereas for those inbound passengers, they have not yet got into the community, so we have the responsibility to stop them getting into the community. For local residents, when they tested positive, they are already at home, and that is the difference. We have to stop the viruses coming from abroad. There is also the possibility of more variants of the virus coming from abroad, and we have to make sure that we protect the local community.

We would consider every option, but especially as the Secretary for Health, and for the Government as well in general, we have to realise that the control of COVID-19 is very important for the health and life of our people, our citizens. We cannot just look at economic activities. Our first priority is to protect the health and life of our people. We would consider every option if it is safe, but we have to have enough data to support whatever policy we are going to do, so we implement this "3+4" (model), which I have to emphasise that it is not a relaxation. It is really not a relaxation of our strategy. We still hold the opinion that we have to reduce infection, reduce serious disease and reduce death during the COVID-19 pandemic. Remember, "3+4" equals seven, so we are changing from a seven-day hotel quarantine into a "3+4" strategy which is also seven days. We have not reduced the length, but we change the four additional days of hotel quarantine into four days of medical surveillance, including the Amber Code which restricts their high-risk activities, and also requires more PCR testing (polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid testing), so that we can identify them and prevent the virus from getting into our local community.

Reporter: Can we see "zero" by the end of this year?

Secretary for Health: I cannot promise. It depends on the COVID-19 situation. Everyone hopes to have more resumption of travel and economic activities, but we have to look at the COVID-19 situation, and we have to remember that the virus continues to mutate and the pandemic is continuing to evolve. Even WHO (World Health Organization) and many experts have warned that the pandemic is not over yet. To say hastily that we will relax everything and go for a zero-quarantine measure will not be practical.

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