

Transcript of remarks by SCS and SFH (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, on the Universal Community Testing Programme at a media session this morning (September 4):

Reporter: A few questions for both ministers. Can you talk about why such slow processing of specimens? As you mentioned that the lab can handle 300 000 samples per day earlier? What are the problems and how the Government is going to resolve and enhance? Do you agree that some said the cost of finding a positive case is as high as \$5 million? And do you think it is worthwhile? Thirdly, concerning the Mainland team, you mentioned 420 of them are in town, why is it such a big group and what are their roles and why can't local staff cope with that? How many Mainland staff will eventually come? And my last question is can people who have done the test already to register again while you extend the testing programme?

Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, regarding the laboratory test of the samples, as you may know, we are having a big number of samples taken in a total of 141 community testing centres every day. These samples will be sent to the laboratory for testing. Of course, for the first day or so, there are different procedures that need to smoothen out. Initially all the procedures are planned but there are bound to be some teething problems. Now, all these issues are already resolved. It is actually running very smoothly. It is only a matter of reporting time, and the number of testing right now is going up. As for the Mainland team, I think one of the reasons of having an even more efficient laboratory testing is with the help of the Mainland team. Yesterday, about 200 people arrived and, since early August there are about another 220 people, so altogether there are 420. They are working day and night in the laboratory. As far as Hong Kong is concerned, we would not be able to have this big capacity and this big number of machines and everything. As you may know, in the past eight months, we have been ramping up our testing capacity in terms of trying to get more people working more hours in the day and having more machines. But still, with such a big programme involving all the citizens in Hong Kong, without the help of the Mainland team we would not be able to do it. We have been able to get help from the Mainland in terms of the laboratory testing. The Mainland participants are mainly experienced laboratory technicians to help the laboratory testing. On the healthcare professionals who are taking swabs in the centres, they all come from Hong Kong. Lastly whether it is worthwhile. I think just now both myself and Patrick (the Secretary for the Civil Service) have already said many times. It is very important for us to have not only usual medical laboratory testing for the confirmed cases, and not only the target group testing, but also have this universal community testing to provide an opportunity for everyone in Hong Kong. If they want to test, they have the opportunity to get a free test. Now this is very important for us to

have this whole picture of whether there are more silent carriers in the community, and to cut the transmission chain so that the spread would be stopped. This is very important for the control and prevention of the entire epidemic and also important for us to prepare for the next wave in the winter. It is very worthwhile even if we can find one positive case. Now that we have already found six and I think there might be more. This would enable us to stop the transmission chain, and isolate and quarantine the people whom we have identified. I have said many times, it can let us understand the situation better. Even the number of negative cases is also an important figure for us to understand (the situation in community).

Secretary for the Civil Service: The purpose of the Universal Community Testing Programme is to provide a one-off, free COVID-19 test to those citizens who wish to be tested. Our design is to provide a one-off, free COVID-19 test. We do not encourage, and actually there is no need for, one who has been tested to do it again. But our system would not preclude people from registering again for two reasons. Firstly, for those who made a booking but subsequently want to reschedule it, we would allow them to cancel the booking and then to book it again. Secondly, a person, who had been tested but then had exposure to high-risk places or people, may feel uncomfortable and want to be tested again. We will not preclude this. But generally, there is no need to do it again after having done it once. So that is basically the purpose and the arrangements.

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