

Transcript of remarks of inter-departmental press conference (with photos/video)

The Acting Chief Executive, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, together with the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan; the Commissioner for Tourism, Mr Joe Wong; and the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko, held an inter-departmental press conference this afternoon (January 23). Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: The Government just announced from tomorrow all passengers arriving the high-speed rail terminus will be required to fill in that declaration form. Will you agree that Government is acting in hindsight because medical experts have for days asked you to do such thing? And why are there visitors from different border checkpoints are not required to do the same? Is the Government not taking this matter seriously enough? And my second question is – why no travel warning has been issued to Wuhan? Is it, you know, a political decision because the Government don't want to embarrass the Central Government? And finally, is the Government aware of any other highly suspected cases as of now? Thank you

Acting Chief Executive: I will deal with the first question and then leave it to Dr Chan to elaborate a bit further on why other border control points would not practice this at the moment. The reason why we go for mandatory health screening form for those passengers using the high-speed rail was examined in detail today. As I said in my press standup the other day, I said we wouldn't rule out the possibility of extending it, not just to Wuhan passengers but to other passengers from the Mainland. And in fact I raised the question this morning at the meeting. We had a very successful, very fruitful discussion. The conclusion is that in the light of what's happening now, particularly the recent event, we've decided to extend it to passengers from other cities also using the high-speed rail. They should fill in the form and then provide information to the fullest possible extent. But for other border crossing points, I will leave it to Dr Chan to explain later why there's a technical point there. But we won't rule out the possibility in the long term. In the immediate term, priority is the high-speed rail first, okay?

The second question is whether travel warning has been issued. As I said earlier, we've already advised school authorities, for example, to hold off the so-called experiential tour to the Mainland as a lot of schools organise this during the holidays. This will last till the situation has settled, has stabilised, later on. So, we will provide, from time to time, so-called travel advisory to people, the stakeholders concerned. I'll leave it to Dr Chan now to explain the point on cross-border control point.

Director of Health: Yes actually at the very onset of the event we have already engaged top scientists and microbiologists in advising the Government in our response measures. So we dedicated our available resources to the most efficient and effective means, and so we decided, based on the risk-assessment approach, we determined that using temperature screening at all border control points would be the priority measures, and it proved to be so, because you will notice from yesterday, the first case, it was actually picked up by our temperature screening. And we have picked up cases who filled in the forms without declaring any problems, but was actually detected by our temperature screening. As the epidemiology evolved, we have reviewed our manpower and considered that we could introduce health declaration point at the West Kowloon Terminal with the high-speed rail. We could focus more and the health declaration form may be able to assist us in contact tracing. This would be useful because if the health declaration form includes the contact details and the carriage has specific allocation to specific passengers, it would be useful. On the other hand, when there's no specific allocation of seat on a carriage, it might not be very effective in assisting contact tracing. So we decided to, as a first step, based on the current situation, introduce the temperature screening and then on top of that the health declaration form at the (West) Kowloon high-speed rail station.

Reporter: ... (inaudible)

Director of Health: As of today at 5pm there is none.

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

