

Transcript of remarks of press conference (with photos/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on July 13. Also joining were the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong; the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui; Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Mr Thomas Chan and the Director of Health, Dr Constance Chan. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Just a few English questions. The Government has set a new rule saying there will be no eating and services after 6pm. So can you explain why do you think it might help curb the virus spreading and what about lunch time and breakfast time because these are peak hours too so why not include these times? And second question regarding making it mandatory to wear a mask on public transport, why only public transport and not public areas in general, because in other countries we do see this rule applying to other public areas? Third question, because this tightening of anti-epidemic measures is certainly going to deal a blow to the recovery of the economy and the recovery of the businesses so would the Government consider giving another round of anti-epidemic subsidies to help these businesses out? And separate question regarding the primaries of the pan-dems, what do you make of hundreds of thousands of people defying your minister's warning that it is a breach of the National Security Law and people turning out to vote anyways? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I'll invite the Secretary for Food and Health to address the first two questions about eating, prohibition and wearing a mask and I'll come back to answer the other two questions.

Secretary for Food and Health: Thank you for your question. For this time when we devise the regulations and directions, first of all, it is targeted. We look at the recent outbreak and also the latest situation. For example, many of the mask off activities are actually high risk. Not only they are high risk of transmission, when more people gather together, there is also a high risk of transmission or extending the transmission chain in the community. Therefore, in terms of both mask wearing and catering business directions, we are targeting at the recent cases that we have found. For example, a number of them are found in the eateries and also a number of them are taxi drivers and passengers. Therefore, Cap 599F and Cap 599I are devised in terms of this targeted approach and also targeting at the mask-off approach. Of course, we understand that we also have to strike a balance. If we close the entire catering business, not allowing breakfasts and lunches, this would be a big disruption to the community. We reckon that there are people going to work. It is important for us to minimise the time people spending on dining in. Therefore, we issue this direction of not allowing dining in from 6pm to 5am (the following day). I think this is basically the

thinking behind our amendments to the regulations and directions.

Chief Executive: On the question about the impact on business of the tightening of the social distancing restrictions, we naturally confess that this will have an adverse impact on business, especially with the closures of the 12 types of premises and for the first time the banning of eat-in for restaurants after 6pm. But you will recall that in the last five, six months, whenever we talked about this subject, we said that we were in a situation of a three-way tug of war. One is we have to take account of the latest public health situation, secondly is the economic impact and thirdly is the social acceptability of the people. I think based on what we have seen in the last seven or eight days about the re-emergence of local cases and the spread and the diversity of these local cases, this is the time for tightening, which means that it will affect business, which means that people will become more inconvenienced. I will have to appeal to people, that I fully understand they want to go to Book Fair, they want to go to restaurant, they want to meet friends, but this is a time for us to put our act together in order to fight this latest re-emergence of cases.

As far as business is concerned, we will continue to help our businesses because this is very important to Hong Kong. The Employment Support Scheme (ESS) is still available. We are still only in the first batch covering the three months of June, July and August. We will have a second tranche of payment from September, October to November. We will invite applications, hopefully, either end of this month or early August. That subsidy is still there to help businesses to preserve jobs as much as possible. Beyond the ESS, if there are particular areas that we feel some more targeted help is needed, the Government will provide it. You may or may not recall that since approval by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, we have actually improved more than half a dozen of new items which were not in the original plan, like the laundries and the car repair shops, and we are paying these new items from what we call the contingency from the AEF (Anti-epidemic Fund). Right now I still have over \$8 billion of contingency to meet the needs of business in a very targeted manner. I'm very willing to deploy the contingency to help the business, so it's a bit premature to talk about another round. I think the right approach is to understand the needs of certain businesses and try to provide help as early as possible.

The last question has nothing to do – or it may have something to do with COVID-19 if the gathering that we have seen over the last two days have resulted in more infections in Hong Kong, and that is a very regretful approach. Election is a very serious and solemn matter in every jurisdiction. People have to uphold their right to be able to cast a vote in an election which is open, fair and honest. We will not tolerate any practices trying to interfere, disrupt, cause confusion to a coming election in September for the Legislative Council. As far as what has happened over the last two days on this so-called "primary" – by the way there is no such thing as a primary in Hong Kong's election system, I hope people would not be confused by this so-called "primary", it is not part of Hong Kong's electoral system – we have received quite a large number of complaints relating to the two days of activities, mainly in three aspects. One is it is causing unfairness to the

upcoming election because of the way that it is presented to the people. Secondly is it will probably have breached the 599G on prohibiting group gathering of more than 50 people because in some of the places we have seen large queues and large crowd. And finally is breaching the privacy protection, which I believe the Privacy Commissioner is looking into this area. Different departments have received a large number of complaints and we will have to investigate. If we discover there is sufficient evidence to take action, we will take action. This is a lawful society. I will just put down a further note of warning: if this so-called "primary" election's purpose is to achieve the ultimate goal of delivering what they call a "35+" with the objective of objecting to, resisting every policy initiative of the Hong Kong SAR Government, then it may fall into the category of subverting the state power, which is now one of the four types of offences under the new National Security Law. I'm not saying that it has breached it but I have to put forward a warning that if that is going to be proven to be the case, then there is certainly a case to answer. Thank you.

Reporter: My first question is, regarding the cost of the two bodies engaged in trying to carry out tests, what would be the estimated cost and will the cost be made transparent later when the test is carried out? And the second question is, you just said you have spent the past week preparing for the latest round of the anti-epidemic measures, but given the drastic restrictions to be imposed on the restaurants and the food and beverage sector, did you actually consult them in the past week before introducing this? The third one is, we've seen a number of cases, we've seen an elderly care home in Tsz Wan Shan completely compromised by the virus. There have been wide calls for the Government to introduce testing in elderly care homes a lot earlier, but the response which the Government have given was sort of disproportionate at the earlier stage. Do you think that the failure of the Government to respond proactively has contributed to what we are seeing at the elderly home in Tsz Wan Shan right now? Thanks.

Chief Executive: The first and third questions are related to testing. I'll address that. As far as the restaurants are concerned, maybe Secretary for Food and Health could answer that. First of all, to ramp up the testing capacity is not an easy task. We have been discussing and exploring various options over the last few weeks, and we managed, with the support of especially the Shenzhen Municipal Government to help us or even send the experts to us, to secure this latest test provider, which has been doing a huge amount of tests in various Mainland cities and even in overseas countries. The other test provider has been operating in Macao, and we are also discussing with them for a while. Finally, I can assure you that the estimated cost will be in the public domain, the unit cost per test, because the money will come out from the Anti-epidemic Fund and we promised the Legislative Council that we will be as transparent, as accountable, as possible in accounting for the money that we have spent under the Anti-epidemic Fund. I'll just give you a little bit of preview. When you finally see the cost, the cost will be lower than what we have been quoting in Hong Kong, running into \$1,200, but it will not be as low as in Shenzhen or Macao because of the cost of logistics, and the cost of logistics is high because of the staff costs and the transportation costs. This cost of collecting all

the specimens and so on, it will jack up the cost of a test in Hong Kong, but it will still be cheaper than what we have seen. So it will be helpful for the next phase, when travellers need to have a COVID-19 test negative in order to cross the border, in order to go on a travel bubble. I believe that what we are now doing in ramping up private sector capacity will be helpful to our next stage of work.

As far as elderly homes are concerned, I have to be very frank with you, throughout the last five months my biggest worry is an outbreak in an elderly home because of the situation of our homes, especially in the private homes. We have still yet to find out the exact cause of this particular outbreak, but once there is an infection, apparently it's spread very fast. Dr Law told me that there are now only four elderly residents who are not infected, so over 30 have been infected. We have been doing testing in homes. According to Director of Health, she has been sending bottles into elderly homes to ask them to return the saliva specimens for tests to be conducted, and I think the figure is running into two, three thousand, and all are negative. But if you do a comprehensive one involving 40 000, then it brings us back to the capacity issue. I'm happy to say that we've now solved that, so we will go for more comprehensive testing in the four high-risk groups that I have just mentioned.

Secretary for Food and Health: Your question is about the catering business and our measures this time issued for the catering business under Cap 599F. In terms of the catering business, of course when you see that in our recent outbreak, many of the confirmed cases are from these small or medium-sized eateries. Therefore, it is precautionary for us to tighten the existing (requirements), for example, the number of people, capacity and even the time that people spend in these eateries. So, there are the directions not permitting dining in after certain hours as well as cutting down to four people per table plus 50 per cent capacity. In such a rush we had to make these decisions. In terms of consultation, I learnt from the restaurants operators that actually many people have already cancelled the tables that they have reserved. Yesterday I visited some of the small eateries. The operators were actually quite thankful to our AEF (Anti-epidemic Fund) for the catering business and also our ESS (Employment Support Scheme). Although they understand their business will be affected, they are also mindful of the epidemic situation and the latest local situation. Because they well know that if these requirements are not tightened, perhaps there will be high-risk people who may go to their restaurants or eateries, and that in turn will also affect their business. Therefore, I think there is some understanding among the operators as well.

Chief Executive: I should just supplement that although, as the Secretary said, we have not done any consultations with the catering business sector, the fact that we are now imposing this ban for seven days instead of the more standard 14 days is also a response to their suggestion. On previous rounds of consultation, they said that, "Mrs Lam, if you have to impose strict measures again, could you do seven days, and then seven days if needed?", rather than a 14-day period, which apparently gives them less hope that this measure will be lifted soon. Thank you.

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

