

Transcript of remarks by SFH and SCED at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, and the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, at a media session on the latest social distancing measures today (October 20):

Reporter: Firstly, can I ask about the new rule on tour groups? Can the minister tell us, if there are any breaches of the law, who will be punished? Is it the people who have participated in the tours or the people who are running the tour groups? How are you exactly going to enforce the rules? Are you going to increase checks on these tour groups? If there are any infections found in these groups, will there be any punishments, such as suspension of business for 14 days? Any other follow-up infection control measures to be done on those tours? Secondly, can I ask Professor Chan about the latest developments with flu vaccines? We've seen from some reports that there have been a great shortage with flu vaccines, how is the Government going to address this issue? There have been reports about the meeting with sector representatives and doctors yesterday, can you tell us more about what have been discussed, and what will you do to increase the supply? Which group will be prioritised? How can you ensure that everyone who needs the vaccine can get it?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: I think the proposed exemption for the local tour arrangement is premised on the understanding that travel agents, being the organisers of all these exempted group tours, will take the extra steps in protecting public health and minimising the risks. At the same time, people joining these group (tours) will also be assured that they are getting a service better than managing their own. That's why a very important condition on this is for the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), as the industry's representative group, to help us to administer the entire arrangement, through the undertaking signed between the Council and individual travel agents. For individual travel agents, in the undertaking, they will promise to do things, such as heightening the awareness (of public health) by requiring all the participants to wear masks throughout (the tour), or providing sanitisation, doing cleaning and also enforcing these rules.

You asked what (will happen) if someone does not comply (with the rules). Organisers of the group (tours) are accepting customers who come to enjoy a safe and leisurely tour. I believe customers will have every reason to comply. At the same time,

for the agents, they can turn away customers who are not willing to comply. The most important responsibility falls on the travel agents. If they violate the undertakings, there would be provisions, including not being allowed to continue with their registration (of local tours) with TIC. That means, they will be deprived of the subsidies that they are supposed to enjoy under the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme or the "Spend-to-Redeem" programme that is going to be launched by the (Hong Kong) Tourism Board. So there are such arrangements. Most important of all, it's a happy arrangement where customers and travellers will feel safer, travel agents have got something they can promise to deliver, and the whole industry is taking the extra steps to minimise the risk and allow business to carry on.

Secretary for Food and Health: As far as the flu vaccine is concerned, the Government promotes flu vaccination every year, and there are priority groups that we think should take the vaccine.

This year, because of the heightened vigilance and everybody has more awareness, so, as we understand from the private GPs (general practitioners), there are more people who are willing and would like to take vaccines at an early stage.

Normally every year, people would take vaccine in November and December or even later, but this year everybody has been very vigilant and is very careful and trying to take vaccine. We also understand that there are some supply issues in the private sector.

Last night during the meeting, some of the doctors have expressed concerns. The Department of Health has been monitoring the supply of vaccines not only in the public sector, but also in the private sector. They will continue to communicate very closely with vaccine suppliers to understand the situation, and also ensure that there are vaccines provided to private practitioners, especially a number of private practitioners that have participated in the Government's vaccination subsidy programme. They actually will be targeting many of the priority groups set by the Government. So, we will continue to monitor the situation, and also to communicate with the suppliers, to make sure the situation is okay.

We are also considering working with the suppliers to arrange some additional vaccines for the private doctors who have participated in the Government vaccination programme. This is welcomed by the practitioners when we told them this news last night. And of course we also told them if the Government is going to work with the

vaccine suppliers, to give them some of the additional vaccine supply, then, first of all, they cannot charge extra to their patients, and secondly, they would have to give those vaccines to priority groups that the Government has designated.

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

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