

**The Administration's Response to Questions raised by Members
at the Meeting of the LegCo Panel on Health Services
held on 30 April 2003**

(a) Impact of the use of diluted household bleach solution on public health, environment and sewerage system, and other choices available to the public for disinfection.

The Department of Health advises the public to use household bleach at 1:99 or 1:49 and then rinse or flush with water to disinfect the environment. If it is done properly, only a very small amount of hypochlorite would remain and this should not pose any health hazard. However, hypochlorite is an active oxidizing agent. Mixing it with other detergents may cause strong chemical reaction. To obviate such risk, we therefore advise against mixing bleach with other detergents.

Residual chlorine in sewage can be effectively removed in the sewage treatment process. The monitoring results from the Drainage Services Department showed that the operation of all sewage treatment plants have not been affected. Recent water quality test conducted by the Environmental Protection Department has not detected any sign of significant deterioration in the water quality or negative ecological impact in the Hong Kong waters caused by the use of detergent.

In general, sewage facilities and pipes are made of materials such as glazed earthenware, enamelled fire clay, cast iron or UPVC. Basically, pouring diluted bleach solution, whether it be mixing 1 part of bleach to 99 parts of water, or to 49 parts of water for cleansing vomitus, down sewage pipes would not damage these materials. However, pouring concentrated disinfectant down the pipes for a long period of time may cause erosion to cast iron pipes and reduce their lifespan.

In choosing a suitable disinfectant for disinfecting the environment, factors such as concentration, toxicity, price, convenience of use, etc. should be considered. Apart from household bleach, there are other choices of disinfectant available and examples of such are alcohol and

the phenolics such as printol and lysol. However, alcohol is expensive and only works on clean surface while printol and lysol are toxic and are not recommended for use in general household environment. Common disinfectants like chlorhexidine and cetrimide are skin disinfectants and their activity against viruses are variable. As household bleach is widely available, inexpensive and fast acting, the Department of Health recommends the use of diluted household bleach as an environmental disinfectant.

(b) Clarification on whether it is the decision of Shanghai and Hainan Island authorities to quarantine Hong Kong visitors for 14 and 20 days upon their arrivals in Shanghai and Hainan Island respectively.

We understand from the relevant authorities of Shanghai and Hainan that the municipal / provincial authorities are not imposing any isolation measures on visitors from Hong Kong, unless a visitor shows signs of SARS.

(c) Details of the proposed creation of a \$200 million Training and Welfare Fund for health care workers in their fight against the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and Hon Michael MAK's suggestions to the proposed Fund.

The proposed uses of the Fund are set out in the Administration's paper for the meeting of the LegCo Panel on Health Services to be held on 7 May 2003.

(d) Issues relating to the fight against SARS in Hong Kong raised by the Chief Executive in his meeting with Premier WEN Jiabao in Bangkok while attending the Special ASEAN-China Leaders' Meeting on the outbreak of atypical pneumonia.

At his meeting with Premier WEN Jiabao in Bangkok while attending the Special ASEAN-China Leaders' Meeting on the outbreak of atypical pneumonia, the Chief Executive reported to the Premier the latest situation on atypical pneumonia in Hong Kong, and the measures taken by the Hong Kong Government to contain the spread of the disease. The Premier noted the request for medical supplies put forward by the Chief Executive to the Central Government, and

indicated that the Central Government had set up task force to co-ordinate and supervise the production of materials, so that sufficient supplies would be available in time should there be a need in Hong Kong. He also mentioned that the Central Government would arrange medical staff to give support to Hong Kong if Hong Kong had such a need. The Chief Executive also introduced to the Premier a list of measures proposed by the Hong Kong Government to relieve the impact of atypical pneumonia on the economy. The Premier had pledged full support to Hong Kong's efforts in combating atypical pneumonia.

(e) Measures to reduce the number of infections amongst health care workers.

The measures were set out in the Administration's paper for the last meeting of the LegCo Panel on Health Services held on 30 April 2003. Dr Ko Wing-man, who leads the Task Force on Infection Control in the Hospital Authority, had also elaborated on the Hospital Authority's infection control measures at the Panel meeting on 30 April 2003.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
May 2003