

## **Legislative Council Panel on Health Services**

### **Report on Hong Kong's Anti-SARS Measures**

#### **Purpose**

The Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, jointly with the Department of Health, Hospital Authority, and other key Government bureaux and departments, has recently presented a report on the measures taken to combat and prevent the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) over the past year. This paper informs Members of its details.

#### **Details**

2. The World Health Organization removed Hong Kong from the list of areas affected by SARS on 23 June 2003. To take advantage of the Inaugural Ceremony of the Scientific Advisory Structure of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) on 23 June 2004, key Government bureaux/departments and agencies, led by the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, reported their strategies and measures taken to strengthen our healthcare systems and preparedness to prevent the disease over the last 12 months on 23 June 2004 on that occasion.

3. The Administration learnt important lessons after the SARS epidemic last year. We attach great importance to the full and timely implementation of the recommendations of the SARS Expert Committee. With the concerted efforts of all parties, a tremendous amount of work has been done to improve and strengthen our healthcare systems and preparedness to prevent the resurgence of SARS over the past year. Highlights of the measures taken by the Administration are set out at **Annex**.

4. In giving his comments on the measures taken by the Administration and community in combating SARS on 23 June, Dr Hitoshi Oshitani, Regional Adviser in Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response, WHO West Pacific Regional Office, said he was very much

impressed by the strong commitment the HKSAR Government and leaders had made, the level of coordination and cooperation the various agencies had displayed, and the community involvement in the whole exercise.

5. To enhance transparency of the actions taken by the Administration, the Report on Hong Kong's Anti-SARS Measures presented at the occasion on 23 June was distributed to the press. The Report has also been uploaded to the website of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau at [www.hwfb.gov.hk](http://www.hwfb.gov.hk) for public access.

6. Members are requested to note the content of this paper.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau  
26 June 2004

## Annex

### **Highlights of Anti-SARS Measures Taken**

- A new organization, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP), to spearhead the community effort for the prevention and control of infectious disease was established on 1 June.
- A Board of Scientific Advisers and seven Scientific Committees under the CHP were formed on 23 June to harness and consolidate professional knowledge and expertise in combating infectious diseases.
- The epidemic intelligence exchange and experience sharing with other health authorities (e.g. WHO, Mainland and US CDC) have been institutionalized. We have strengthened the infectious disease notification mechanism with Mainland and Guangdong. The CHP has recently signed a strategic alliance with the UK Health Protection Agency. The CHP will explore cooperation with Singapore, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden.
- We plan to develop a Communicable Disease Information System to allow for a more systematic sharing of information on disease surveillance between the CHP, the Hospital Authority, other healthcare providers and non-healthcare institutions.
- We have established an overall contingency mechanism, underpinned by detailed contingency plans, to set out clear command structure for making and implementing decisions.
- Over 50 drills in the hospital and community settings to assess the workability of the contingency plans have been conducted. We will organize another multi-party drill in October, which will involve observers from overseas health protection agencies.
- About 1,400 isolation beds are now available in 14 acute hospitals throughout the territory for receiving and treating SARS patients. We have also sought funds to construct a new infectious disease centre in Princess Margaret Hospital.

- Since last September, more than 30,000 healthcare workers have received training on infection control.
- We have designated infection control officers and strengthened isolation facilities in the homes for the elderly and disabled. Vaccination to needy elders has also been provided.
- A Handbook on Prevention of SARS in Schools with detailed guidelines and information has been compiled. A series of precautionary measures such as temperature monitoring of students have been implemented in schools.
- A host of environmental improvement measures have been implemented in rental estates, e.g. drainage ambassador scheme, upgrading works for refuse collection and handling facilities, installation of biochemical systems to remove hazardous and odorous pollutants, and improved domestic refuse disposal arrangement. Public awareness of environmental hygiene in housing estates has been elevated through quarterly large-scale floor cleaning operation.
- Over 30,000 buildings have been inspected and over 6,000 defective pipes have been identified. So far, defective pipes in over 3,300 buildings have been rectified. Over 1,850 unauthorized building works have been removed, and over 770 defective drains have been rectified.
- We have enhanced efforts on environmental hygiene, e.g. rodent control, washing and cleaning of target areas, stringent enforcement action against littering, etc. We have also enhanced control on food premises and markets, e.g. monthly market cleansing day, incentive scheme to improve hygiene conditions of food premises, stringent enforcement actions, and regular inspection by Health Inspectors, etc.
- Wild animals surveillance for test of SARS virus has been conducted. All the results are negative.
- We have enhanced coordination with relevant Government departments and communication with the tourist trade and the Mainland authorities for dissemination of health information to incoming tourists. Specific

guidelines on precautionary and preventive measures have been drawn up in consultation with tourism and related trade.

- We have enhanced communication between Government and the public on environmental hygiene through a series of activities and public education. Major activities include eradication of blackspots, organization of month end cleansing, and district hygiene squads.