

Statement by the Director of Health

Thursday, October 2, 2003

Following is the statement by the Director of Health, Dr Lam Ping-yan, in response to the report released by the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) Expert Committee today (October 2):

In the early stage of the SARS outbreak, the medical profession had little knowledge of this new virus. The rapid worsening of the epidemic and the continued upsurge in cases did highlight room for improvement in the organisation of the Department of Health. Nonetheless, throughout the battle, as the public will appreciate, various government departments have mobilised maximum manpower and resources to combat the disease. Frontline workers, particularly health care staff and volunteer groups, fought tirelessly with all their might. Their contributions deserve our recognition.

The Expert Committee has recommended in the Report the setting up of a health protection framework to equip the government with sufficient surge capacity in carrying out her roles in relation to infectious diseases, including surveillance, analysis, investigation, control, training and research as well as health education, and at the same time to strengthen her response ability and statutory authority in this connection. I believe that the establishment of such framework will significantly enhance Hong Kong's surge capability to combat infectious diseases. We welcome the recommendations of the Expert Committee and will actively pursue the initiatives. The new framework will commence operation as soon as possible.

In stepping up our efforts in the prevention and control of the spread of SARS and other infectious diseases, the department is currently working on a series of initiatives:

- a) enhancing communication and cooperation with our neighbors. An Example is the immediate notification among Guangdong, Macao and Hong Kong authorities in case of emergence of infectious diseases of unknown causes;
- b) putting in place an enhanced contingency response plan;
- c) strengthening cooperation and collaboration with the Hospital Authority, private hospitals and the medical profession;
- d) re-organising the department for more efficient control of diseases;
- e) conducting a global hunt for epidemiologists and virologists for our new framework;
- f) strengthening liaison, cooperation and training with the Centre for Disease Control, US and the UK Health Protection Agency; and

g) strengthening cooperation with local universities including in applied research activities.

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