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Panel on Health Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 5 February 2021**

**Measures for the prevention and control
of coronavirus disease 2019 in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the concerns of Members on the Administration's measures for the prevention and control of coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") in Hong Kong.

Background

2. A cluster of viral pneumonia cases of unknown causative pathogen was first detected in Wuhan of Hubei Province in December 2019. The Mainland authorities confirmed on 7 January 2020 that the etiologic agent responsible for the cases had been identified as a novel beta coronavirus (in the same family as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV). The virus and the disease it caused were respectively named by the World Health Organization ("WHO") as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 ("SARS-CoV-2") and COVID-19 on 11 February 2020. Following its declaration of the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, WHO characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As at 29 January 2021, at least 101 513 704 confirmed cases have been reported in 222 countries or areas, including at least 2 186 400 fatal cases. According to WHO, most estimates of the incubation period of COVID-19 range from one to 14 days, most commonly around five to six days. The most common symptoms of the disease are fever,

tiredness and dry cough. Some patients may have loss of taste or smell, nasal congestion, conjunctivitis, sore throat, headache, muscle or joint pain, different types of skin rash, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, chills or dizziness. About 80% of the infected who develop symptoms recover from the disease without needing hospital treatment. Around 15% become seriously ill and require oxygen and 5% become critically ill and need intensive care. People aged 60 years or above and people with underlying medical problems are at higher risk of developing serious illness.

3. Locally, the Government launched the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance ("the Plan")¹ on 4 January 2020, under which a three-tier response level, namely Alert, Serious and Emergency, is adopted. The cluster of viral pneumonia cases detected in Wuhan is regarded as a Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance.² The Serious Response Level³ was activated with immediate effect. The Hospital Authority ("HA") announced on the same day the activation of Serious Response Level in public hospitals. Separately, with effect from 8 January 2020, "Severe Respiratory Diseases associated with a Novel Infectious Agent" has been added as a scheduled infectious disease to Schedule 1 to the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) and a specified disease in section 56 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A).⁴ Based on the assessment that the risk of health impact caused by the disease on the local population is high and imminent, the response level under the Plan has been raised to the Emergency Level⁵ on 25 January 2020. HA announced on the same day the activation of Emergency Response Level in public hospitals.

4. The Centre for Health Protection ("CHP") of the Department of Health ("DH") has enhanced surveillance since 31 December 2019 in response to the

¹ The Plan can be accessed at the website of the Centre for Health Protection at https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/govt_preparedness_and_response_plan_for_novel_infectious_disease_of_public_health_significance_eng.pdf.

² "Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance" is defined as any infectious disease caused by a pathogen unknown to cause human disease before, but may have changed its property to cause human infection with or without the ability of efficient human-to-human transmission. The disease has the potential to lead to international spread and public health emergency.

³ Serious Response Level corresponds to a situation where the risk of health impact caused by the novel infection on local population in Hong Kong is moderate.

⁴ With effect from 28 April 2020, "Severe Respiratory Diseases associated with a Novel Infectious Agent" under Schedule 1 to the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance has been renamed as "coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)", and "SARS-CoV-2" has been added in Schedule 2 to the Ordinance as a Scheduled Infectious Agent so that the owner or the person in charge of a laboratory is required to notify the Director of Health any leakage of the infectious agent in the laboratory.

⁵ Emergency Response Level depicts a high risk of serious human infections caused by the novel infectious agent in Hong Kong, and serious infections may be widespread. It generally applies to situation where there is evidence or imminent risk of sustained community level outbreaks.

emergence of the cluster of viral pneumonia cases in Wuhan.⁶ As of 27 January 2021, CHP has recorded a total of 10 283 confirmed cases and one probable case of COVID-19. Among these cases, 916 were still hospitalized or pending for admission, 9 162 were discharged and 174 were fatal cases. The cases include 4 974 males and 5 309 females with ages of the cases ranged from 40 days to 100 years (with the median age being 45 years). The latest epidemic curve of confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Hong Kong is in **Appendix I**. The number of confirmed cases by case classification for the recent 28-day period as of 27 January 2021 is in **Appendix II**.

Deliberations by Members

5. The Panel on Health Services ("Panel") discussed issues relating to the measures for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in Hong Kong at nine meetings, and the procurement and administration of COVID-19 vaccines at one meeting. The deliberations and concerns of members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Immigration control measures and quarantine arrangements

6. At the early stage of the COVID-19 epidemic when the Mainland was the epicentre, many members urged the Administration to take heed of the call from some medical experts for a complete closure of immigration control points to stop the flow of visitors from the Mainland to Hong Kong, albeit that various measures had already been put in place by the Administration in phases to reduce the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong at that time. The Panel passed two motions at the meeting on 20 March 2020 urging the Administration to, among others, deny the entry of all non-Hong Kong residents to Hong Kong through different immigration control points and conduct viral tests for all inbound travellers.

7. The Administration advised that it had all along adopted a risk-based approach in formulating immigration control measures. It was announced that with effect from 25 March 2020 until further notice, all non-Hong Kong residents coming from overseas countries and regions by plane would be denied entry to Hong Kong; non-Hong Kong residents coming from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan would be denied entry to Hong Kong if they had been to any overseas countries and regions in the past 14 days; all transit services at Hong

⁶ The prevailing reporting criteria of COVID-19 are: (a) presented with fever or acute respiratory illness or pneumonia; and (b) either one of the following conditions within 14 days before onset of symptom:(i) with travel history to a place with active community transmission of COVID-19 (including all places outside Hong Kong currently); or (ii) had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Kong International Airport would be suspended; and all travellers coming from, or having stayed in, Macao and Taiwan would be subject to a 14-day compulsory quarantine, which was the same as the arrangements for arrivals from the Mainland. In addition, starting from 8 April 2020, all asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving at Hong Kong International Airport would be mandated to immediately proceed to the temporary specimen collection centre of DH at Asia World-Expo to collect their deep throat saliva samples at the venue. The above arrangement was later refined to require those inbound travellers who arrived on flights in the morning to wait for the viral test results at the centre. For inbound travellers who arrived on flights in the afternoon or at night and hence, whose test results would not be available on the same day, they would be taken to DH's Holding Centre for Test Result in the Regal Oriental Hotel in Kowloon City to wait for their test results. Those who were tested positive would be arranged for admission to hospital for treatment while the close contacts who travelled with them would be sent to designated quarantine centres. There was a call from members that the Administration should put in place measures to ensure that the latter arrangement would not pose health risks to the community of the Kowloon City District.

8. Taking into account that the number of cases reported in the Mainland had been decreasing since the peak in mid-February 2020, there were calls from some members in April 2020 that persons who had genuine business needs for travelling between Hong Kong and the Mainland, such as manufacturers with factories in the Mainland, should be exempted from the 14-day quarantine requirement under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C).⁷ Members were subsequently advised that in view of the latest situation of COVID-19, the Regulation had been amended to provide a legal framework for broadening the exemption of persons or category of persons from compulsory quarantine with effect from 29 April 2020 to cover, among others, travellers whose travelling was necessary for purposes relating to manufacturing operations, business activities or provision of professional service in the interest of Hong Kong's economic development. Some members returning from different functional constituencies urged the relevant government bureaux to expeditiously hammer out the exemption arrangement for various categories of persons for consideration of the Chief Secretary for Administration. There was, however, a concern about exempting crew members of aircrafts, goods vessels and passenger ships from compulsory quarantine arrangement.

⁷ A subcommittee was formed at the House Committee meeting on 16 October 2020 to study items of subsidiary legislation made under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) relating to the measures implemented by the Administration in response to the COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong. As of 3 February 2021, the subcommittee has held eight meetings and made three written reports and one oral report on its scrutiny work.

9. Stepping into May 2020, members in general considered that with millions of cases recorded worldwide, it was unrealistic to aim for eradication or elimination of COVID-19 in Hong Kong in the near future. Against the above, prevention and control of COVID-19 was expected to be a part of the new normal of the daily operation of the society. Since the epidemic situation in Hong Kong had become more stabilized in terms of the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, some members proposed the adoption of the "travel bubble" concept, whereby bilateral arrangement was to be established between Hong Kong and a particular country or place where the outbreak situation was under control and would not pose a public health risk to Hong Kong which was higher than the local risk, such as Macao, Shenzhen and Zhuhai, for gradually resumption of limited traveller movement.

10. Members were subsequently advised that a two-tier regime was introduced under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) in June 2020⁸ under which the compulsory quarantine requirement applied to persons arriving at Hong Kong from a Category 1 specified place, and did not apply to persons arriving at Hong Kong from a Category 2 specified place if they met certain conditions (such as having a negative COVID-19 test result) so as to allow for the imposition or lifting of different quarantine or other infection control safeguards according to the respective public health risks level of different places. Separately, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government had been exploring with the governments of Guangdong Province and Macao Special Administrative Region under the framework of joint prevention and control on the resumption of the cross-boundary people flow between Hong Kong and Guangdong, and between Hong Kong and Macao in an orderly manner once the epidemic situation had stabilized. The three governments intended to mutually recognize the COVID-19 tests carried out by designated testing facilities which met the standards, to be done through the "Health Codes" of the three places.

11. With the local epidemic situation underwent drastic changes from having no confirmed local cases in 21 consecutive days in mid-June 2020 to identifying 31 new cases without travel history during the incubation period from 2 to 8 July 2020, some members raised the concern at the meeting on 10 July 2020 that the new wave of the epidemic might be caused by the exemption arrangements under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation⁹ ("exemption arrangements"). The Administration advised that starting from 8 July 2020, all persons exempted

⁸ See footnote 7.

⁹ See footnote 7.

from quarantine entering Hong Kong by air had to proceed to DH's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre to have their deep throat saliva samples collected, or to collect their samples at home and return it according to instructions. As air crew and sea crew members made up the largest group of exempted persons, they would be required to have their deep throat saliva samples collected at the Centre to further lower the chance of the virus spreading in Hong Kong. Besides, the exempted person would be subject to medical surveillance arranged by DH for a period of 14 days.

12. Given that the number of confirmed local cases with unknown sources had surged inexorably since November 2020, members continued to express deep concern on the exemption arrangements. Members unanimously called for more stringent measures to plug possible loopholes to prevent importation of the virus from overseas high risk areas. A motion was passed at the meeting on 13 November 2020 requesting the Administration to implement more stringent testing arrangement for all inbound travellers including exempted persons upon their arrival at Hong Kong.

13. The Administration advised that having regard to the deteriorating epidemic situation overseas, they had tightened quarantine arrangements for inbound travelers as well as the testing and isolation arrangements for exempted persons upon their arrival at Hong Kong. Exempted persons arriving Hong Kong from very high risk places would be subject to the "test-and-hold" arrangement and they were required to wait for the testing results at designated locations. In addition, the scope of activity of the exempted persons would be limited to the purpose as designated in the exemption, and point-to-point transportation would be arranged by the respective organizations with a view to minimizing their contact with the local community.

Quarantine facilities

14. Members noted that Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre, Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and Chun Yeung Estate had been used as quarantine centres, providing around 2 300 units in total. On the arrangement implemented since mid-March 2020 that inbound travellers subject to the 14-day compulsory quarantine requirements were permitted to serve their quarantine at home or other self-nominated places in order to maintain the capacity of the quarantine centres to cope with the requirements for close contacts of confirmed cases and occasional clusters, members expressed concern about the health risks arising from persons placed under home quarantine given the small living area per capita in Hong Kong. The Panel passed a motion at the meeting on 20 March 2020 urging the Administration to, among others, discuss with the hotel industry the underwriting of suitable hotels as temporary quarantine centres for returning

Hong Kong residents, so as to address the issue of insufficient quarantine facilities and lower the risk of second generation spread of the disease in the community. The Administration advised that given that hotels were designed for leisure and recreational purposes, most of the rooms were equipped with central air-conditioning and were enclosed. Hence, they did not meet the requirements of quarantine centres to have independent air-conditioning with fresh air ventilation. That said, hotels could be an option for people who were required to undergo compulsory quarantine under the law.

15. Many members were concerned that prospective tenants who had accepted the advance housing offer of Chun Yeung Estate had experienced serious inconvenience or problems due to the deferred intake arising from the Administration's use of the Estate as a temporary quarantine centre since February 2020. They called on the Administration to announce the timetable for ceasing the use of Chun Yeung Estate as quarantine centre to enable the prospective tenants of the Estate to plan ahead their arrangements for moving in.

16. Following the announcement of the Administration on 26 June 2020 that the use of the quarantine centre at Chun Yeung Estate would cease in end-July 2020, members noted at the meeting on 10 July 2020 that the fourth and fifth blocks of Chun Yeung Estate had already been vacated in the second half of June 2020 and restoration works were underway. It was expected that the first batch of prospective tenants could gradually move in starting from the end of August 2020. Separately, it was expected that an additional 800 quarantine units at the Penny's Bay Government site could be put to use in end-July 2020. In addition, the construction of quarantine facilities at a site at Penny's Bay which had been reserved for future tourism development was underway and was estimated to provide additional 700 units in September 2020. To cater for the special medical needs of some residents in residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") when there were confirmed cases in RCHEs, temporary quarantine centre had been set up for residents of RCHEs at the Hong Kong Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied ("PHAB") Association Jockey Club PHAB Camp.

Viral testing capacity and community surveillance for COVID-19

17. Members were concerned about the turnaround time of the COVID-19 viral tests performed by the Centre for Health Protection ("CHP") under DH and HA and the testing capacity of public institutions. Questions were raised as to whether and, if so, how the Administration would enhance its viral testing capacity for COVID-19 to around 7 500 tests per day, which, according to experts' advice, would help reduce the risk of virus transmission in the community, as well as the use of the \$220 million provided under the Anti-epidemic Fund for enhancing the testing capacity. There were

suggestions that the Administration should consider employing newly developed rapid tests to expedite the identification of confirmed cases, and providing viral test to all Hong Kong citizens through assistance from the Mainland, e.g. by inviting the Mainland experts to come to Hong Kong to carry out such work and sending specimens taken in Hong Kong for testing in laboratories on the Mainland.

18. The Administration advised that with the funding of around \$220 million provided under the Anti-epidemic Fund for DH to procure testing equipment and enhance manpower support so as to step up its testing capability, and to the medical schools of The University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong to procure testing equipment in order to provide more virus testing services, it was expected that an additional 2 400 tests could be provided per day. The Administration's short-term target was to enhance the testing capacity of public institutions to 7 500 virus tests a day by end-July 2020. Given the current limited testing capacity, it would focus on performing targeted tests on those higher-risk groups involved in the recent community cluster cases. The Administration also welcomed any efforts, including those from the Mainland and the private sector, to enhance Hong Kong's overall testing capability. A case in point was the engagement of three private institutions to take over the large-scale voluntary community testing for the designated higher-risk groups, including staff members of RCHEs, residential care homes for persons with disabilities ("RCHDs") as well as nursing homes; restaurant staff; and taxi drivers.

19. On members' concern about the presence of cases with false negative results which might increase the risk of spreading the disease in the community, the Administration explained that reasons contributing to false negative results included the collection technique of deep throat saliva samples and the viral load of the patients concerned. Subject to clinical assessment, repeated tests would be arranged where necessary.

20. As the epidemic had persisted for months with no signs of its subsidence, at the meeting on 13 November 2020, there were calls among members for stricter and decisive measures for achieving the target of "zero" infection case in the community. Suggestion of universal compulsory testing was strongly put forth to help identifying asymptomatic infected persons and cut the silent transmission chains in the community. In response to the suggestion, the Administration explained that a risk-based and precision-guided testing strategy had been implemented for epidemic surveillance and testing in Hong Kong. Under this approach, specified high risk groups would be required to undergo compulsory testing on a mandatory basis, whereas targeted groups would be arranged to undergo testing on an obligatory basis. Other members of the public would be encouraged to undergo testing on a voluntary basis. The

Administration considered the above three-pronged strategy more appropriate for adoption in Hong Kong having regard to local situation and circumstances.

21. On the provision of voluntary testing for general public, members expressed concern at the meeting on 13 November 2020 that the establishment of only four long-term community testing centres was far from adequate. They requested the Administration to expand the testing capacity as far as possible and set up more testing centres across different districts for the convenience of the public to undergo testing. The Administration subsequently advised that a total of 19 community testing centres had been set up with a total daily testing capacity of more than 20 000 tests. In addition, free testing services had been provided through mobile specimen collection stations in different districts and the distribution points for specimen collection packs had been further expanded to encourage more people to undergo testing on a voluntary basis.

Compulsory testing

22. In response to members' enquiries about compulsory testing, the Administration advised that with the outbreak of the fourth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic since November 2020, the Administration had stepped up measures to strengthen epidemic control. Since the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J)¹⁰ came into operation on 15 November 2020, the Administration had published in the Gazette compulsory testing notices multiple times to require specified groups of persons¹¹ to undergo compulsory testing with a view to identifying and cutting the silent transmission chains in the community. In addition, the Administration had expanded the coverage of compulsory testing for residential buildings to achieve community clearing.¹² Following the upsurge in the number of confirmed cases in the Sham Shui Po and Jordan districts within a short period of time since January 2021, compulsory testing had been strengthened in the delineated areas within the districts on a mandatory basis. On 23 January 2021, the Administration made a restriction-testing declaration to require people within the specified restricted areas in Jordan to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. The restriction-testing declaration

¹⁰ See footnote 7.

¹¹ As at 11 January 2021, the Administration has required persons who had been to 121 specified premises (such as dance clubs/venues, restaurants, residential buildings, construction sites, department store and hospitals); symptomatic persons, staff members of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes, day service units attached to the premises of residential care homes and taxi drivers to undergo compulsory virus testing)

¹² With effect from 30 December 2020, if there are two or more units in a building with confirmed cases in the past 14 days and the units concerned are not epidemiologically linked to each other, the building would be included in the compulsory testing notice under Cap. 599J and persons who had been present at that building for more than two hours in the past 14 days are required to undergo compulsory testing.

was lifted on 25 January 2021 with about 7 000 people being tested. In total, 13 confirmed cases had been found (as at midnight of 25 January 2021). The Administration would keep in view the epidemic situation vigilantly and would consider similar operation as and when necessary.

Maintaining social distancing

23. Members noted that with a view to introducing more drastic and effective time-limited measures to ensure social distancing and prevent people from congregating in order to control the spread of COVID-19 in Hong Kong, the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) were made under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance on 27 March 2020.¹³ The former imposed temporary measures on catering business and scheduled premises,¹⁴ whereas the latter prohibited certain group gatherings in public place. Some members called for the launch of the third round of a \$30 billion Anti-epidemic Fund to enhance the support to the sectors affected by the implementation of the social distancing measures, in particular self-employed and others who were not covered by the last two rounds of the Fund.

24. A question was raised as to under what circumstances the social distancing measures imposed under the two Regulations would be lifted to enable the catering business and scheduled premises, which had been hard hit by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the anti-epidemic measures, and general public to resume businesses and social activities. The Administration advised that under the "suppress and lift" strategy for striking an appropriate balance amongst the aspects of public health, economic development and daily operation of society, it would continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation and review the various measures in place with a view to suitably adjusting them taking into account all relevant factors including the number of confirmed cases in Hong Kong and around the globe.

25. Stepping into November 2020 in which epidemic fatigue was observed as evidenced by an apparent rebound in the number of local cases brought about by mask-off gathering activities and staycation in hotels, members expressed deep concern about the effectiveness of the social distancing measures. They also urged the Administration to explore ways to enhance contact tracing to prevent the further spread of the virus in the community. The Administration advised that in response to the upsurge of local cases, they had promptly introduced

¹³ See footnote 7.

¹⁴ Under section 2 of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation, "scheduled premises" meant any premises set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Regulation.

legislative amendments to the relevant regulations to regulate gathering activities in hotels and guesthouses, as well as further tightened social distancing measures. To ensure public compliance of the relevant measures, the Administration gazette in early December legislative amendments to relevant regulations under Cap.599 to raise the fixed penalty for breach of the requirements stipulated therein from \$2,000 to \$5,000 with effect from 11 December 2020. In addition, the Food and Health Bureau would work closely with the Innovation and Technology Bureau and other relevant government departments to enhance information collection and sharing with a view to improving contact tracing efficiency. Assistance from relevant law enforcement agencies such as the Hong Kong Police Force would be sought for taking enforcement actions against non-compliances as well as contact tracing to identify transmission chains in the community as and when necessary.

26. On members' concern over the spread of the virus among foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") and their dormitories, the Administration advised that they would step up promotional efforts to call upon FDHs to comply with relevant regulations on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places. Relevant law enforcement departments would continue to conduct joint operations at appropriate times.

Response measures of HA

27. The issue of surge capacity of HA to cope with the outbreak of COVID-19 in Hong Kong was of considerable concern to members. Members noted that apart from activating most of the 1 400-odd isolation beds in public hospitals, HA had subsequently retrofitted one to two general wards in each hospital cluster into standard negative pressure wards to provide about 400 additional standard negative pressure beds for patients who were recovering but had not yet been confirmed negative for the virus. There was a call that HA should enhance the capacity of its isolation facilities in the longer run under the 10-year Hospital Development Plans to prepare for future outbreak of any communicable diseases. Separately, concern was raised over the stockpile of personal protective equipment ("PPE") for frontline healthcare personnel of public hospitals, which had often fallen below the required level of maintaining three month's consumption to cater for operational needs during emergency situation. HA had also revised its infection control guidelines, which covered the PPE to be worn by clinical staff when carrying out different clinical procedures, from time to time since the outbreak of the disease. HA advised that with the development of the novel coronavirus infection, it had expedited the procurement of PPE since January 2020 and at the same time promoting the effective use of PPE. With the exception of N95 respirator, the supply of other PPE items in mid-April 2020 was more stable when compared to the start of the epidemic.

28. Noting that elective surgeries and other non-emergency services of HA had been deferred since mid-February 2020 to focus the manpower resources of public hospitals to combat the epidemic, some members considered that HA should expand the public-private partnership programmes to tap on the private sector to handle those cases with their appointments at public hospitals being deferred by HA, with a view to ensuring that patients would receive timely medical care. There were also calls from members that the Administration should provide HA's frontline healthcare personnel and supporting staff with special allowance to recognize their efforts to address the demand surge arising from the outbreak of the disease, and prescribe COVID-19 as an occupational disease under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282) to safeguard the interests of employees (including healthcare staff) involving close and frequent contacts with sources of COVID-19 infection arising from their employment in specified high-risk occupation .

29. HA advised that 60% elective surgeries and 70% non-emergency services such as endoscopy examination had been deferred to focus the manpower resources of public hospitals to combat the epidemic. Separately, a funding of \$4.7 billion would be allocated from the Anti-epidemic Fund for HA's deployment on various fronts, including personnel-related expenditure for frontline staff involved in anti-epidemic efforts such as provision of special rental allowance to cater for their temporary accommodation needs and Special Emergency Response Allowance for frontline staff mainly engaging in high risk duties, procuring additional PPE, and enhancing support for laboratory testing. In addition, the Locum Office had recruited part-time doctors to work in HA on a need and ad-hoc basis. On the view that COVID-19 should immediately be listed as a statutory occupational disease for different industries, it should be noted that while COVID-19 was currently not a compensable occupational disease prescribed under Cap. 282, section 36 of the Ordinance stipulated that an employee contracting a disease not prescribed as an occupational disease might still claim compensation from the employer under the Ordinance if it was an injury or death by accident arising out of and in the course of employment, and the employer was in general liable to pay compensation under the Ordinance.

30. Some members expressed concerns that there were cases whereby patients recovered from COVID-19 were tested positive again after discharging from hospital. There was also a call that the Administration should provide post-discharge support for recovered COVID-19 patients and psychological support for family members of the deceased. HA advised that under the prevailing discharge guideline, only those patients who had negative results in two consecutive viral tests conducted at a time interval of more than 24 hours between each test would be discharged from hospital. In some cases, the positive viral test results of the discharged patients might be caused by residual virus in their bodies. Subject to clinical assessment, repeated tests would be arranged. HA would provide discharged patients with healthcare and

emotional support as and when necessary, and refer those cases with financial difficulties to the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") for follow up. The Princess Margaret Hospital would refer suitable patients who had recovered from COVID-19 to the Kwai Tsing District Health Centre to receive various services, including pathology explanation, infection control, emotional support, post-recovery nutritional supplement, consultation on anti-epidemic medication and restructuring of lifestyle, etc.

31. Pointing out that long-stay patients relied more heavily on support from family members both psychologically and in their daily lives, some members enquired about the circumstances under which the visiting arrangements of public hospitals, which had been suspended due to the outbreak of COVID-19, would be gradually resumed. HA advised that acute hospitals and wards would continue to make compassionate arrangement and video-visiting as far as practicable. HA would examine how to resume by phases the visiting arrangements in non-acute hospitals with certain restrictions on the number of visitors and duration of stay if situation permitted.

Support measures for residential care homes

32. Referring to the emergence of confirmed cases in RCHEs for the first time in early July 2020, members asked about the efforts made by the Administration to ensure that appropriate infection control measures had been put in place by RCHEs during the epidemic and adequate PPE was provided for staff members and residents of contract homes, private homes for the elderly participating in Enhanced Bought Place Scheme and private homes issued with licence. They called on the Administration to address the not uncommon problem of residential care units to deploy their staff to work in more than one institution which increased the risk of cross infection, and the poor and crowded living environment of hostels for workers imported by residential care units under the Supplementary Labour Scheme.

33. The Administration advised that SWD had provided all RCHEs and RCHDs with four rounds of special allowance (at a rate of \$5,000 or \$3,000 per round for the first two rounds and \$10,000 or \$6,000 for the third and fourth round) for the procurement of PPE and sanitizing items since January 2020; distributed a total of 10 million surgical masks for the staff of all residential service units since February 2020; and launched an Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy under the Anti-epidemic Fund in May 2020 for all RCHEs and RCHDs to apply an anti-virus coating spray to their premises on or before 31 August 2020. SWD would provide over 4 million surgical masks to all RCHEs and RCHDs in mid July 2020 for use by their residents in need. With the activation of the Hong Kong PHAB Association Jockey Club PHAB Camp as a quarantine centre for residents of the RCHE concerned who were close

contacts of the confirmed cases and were bedridden or requiring special care during the 14 day quarantine period, SWD would arrange for care workers to attend to the needs of residents who needed to be admitted to this quarantine centre. The medical needs of these residents would be taken care of by DH and HA.

Role of the Chinese medicine sector

34. There were views that the Administration should tap on the capacity of the Chinese medicine sector in combating the disease, in particular for preventive care and rehabilitation. The Administration advised that new coronavirus related projects had been added as a support area under the Industry Support Programme of the Chinese Medicine Development Fund to provide funding for non-profit-making organizations, professional bodies, trade and academic associations and research institutions to support training programmes and courses, conduct applied or policy research, and organize various promotional activities in this regard. In addition, HA had launched the Special Chinese Medicine Out-patient Programme on 24 April 2020 whereby free Chinese medicine outpatient rehabilitation service would be provided by designated Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research to discharged persons who had received COVID-19 treatment.

Risk communication

35. In view of the prevalence of voluminous disease-related fake news and rumors on the internet, some members urged the Administration to make speedy public clarifications. The Administration assured members that risk communication, publicity, public education, port health measures, social distancing measures, etc. would continue to be enhanced as and when appropriate to heighten vigilance of the community against the disease. The Workgroup on Communications under the Steering Committee cum Command Centre would make sure that the latest and accurate messages were conveyed to all members of the public and stakeholders speedily and effectively. The most updated health advice could be found at the COVID-19 dedicated webpage in various languages.

36. Members in general welcomed the launch of the "Leave Home Safe" mobile application in November 2020, which could facilitate the public to keep a more precise record of their whereabouts, thereby enhancing the public's awareness to keep vigilance against the epidemic. Given the existence of unknown transmission chains in the community, some members urged the Administration to consider mandating the use of the mobile application by the public to facilitate epidemic surveillance and contact tracing. Taking note of the suggestion, the Administration advised that it would step up publicity efforts

to promote comprehensive use of "Leave Home Safe" among members of the public and address their concern on personal data privacy.

Maintaining environmental hygiene

37. Some members were concerned that the poor and crowded living environment of thousands of subdivided units in the territory and the ageing of public sewers would lead to the community spread of COVID-19. They considered that the Home Affairs Department should play a role in disseminating health and anti-epidemic messages in the district level. Regarding the disinfection work carried out by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department at the premises where the confirmed cases were residing, there was a suggestion that such work should also cover the public places of the building to better safeguard public health. The Administration advised that CHP had issued advice to the property management sector on cleaning and disinfection of environment when there was a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Arrangements for dealing with possible outbreak in school setting

38. Members were concerned about the contingency plan in place for a possible outbreak of COVID-19 in the school setting. The Administration advised that schools should immediately report to CHP when a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 was encountered in school. If a student or staff member was confirmed to be a case of COVID-19, CHP would conduct contact tracing. Close contacts would be put under quarantine and other contacts would be put under medical surveillance.

Procurement and administration of vaccines

39. Extensive discussions were held at the meeting on 16 December 2020 on the procurement of vaccines, arrangement for vaccination by members of the public, safety of the vaccines and the offer of a choice of vaccines to members of the public through private medical practitioners. There were concerns that with a low level of confidence on the effectiveness of the vaccines, coupled with reported cases of adverse side effects associated with vaccination overseas, a majority of the public might not have motivation to take vaccination.

40. In response, the Administration advised that a two-pronged approach had been adopted for the procurement of vaccines. Apart from joining the COVAX Facility led by WHO, the Administration had entered into advance purchase agreements with vaccine developers for obtaining greater supplies as early as possible. When entering into purchase agreements, the Administration would make reference to relevant scientific evidence and clinical data and consult the views of relevant committees under DH and expert groups to ensure safety, efficacy and quality of the vaccines. As regards vaccination arrangement, the

first batch of vaccines would be reserved for high risk groups such as healthcare workers, elderly or staff of residential care homes. Having noted members' suggestion, consideration might also be given to accord priority to frontline workers such as cleansing workers, caretakers of residential estates and public transport drivers. It was the goal of the Administration to provide vaccinations for the majority of the Hong Kong population within 2021.

41. On safety concerns, the Administration advised that they would continue to require vaccine developers to provide updated information including latest clinical data and safety update report on the vaccines, and would closely monitor the situation worldwide. Publicity would be strengthened to ensure transparent, timely and accurate information on vaccines would be disseminated to the public through various channels to allay their concerns and encourage participation in the vaccination programme. As regards vaccination through private medical practitioners, as the vaccines available in the market were approved under emergency use, they were procured through the HKSAR Government and there was no plan of inviting private healthcare organization to participate in the vaccination programme at this stage.

42. The Administration subsequently gazetted the Prevention and Control of Disease (Use of Vaccines) Regulation (Cap. 599K) on 23 December 2020 which provided the legal framework to bring in COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use.¹⁵ Three vaccines had been procured through advance purchase agreements.¹⁶ Making reference to the guidelines from WHO and the safety and efficacy assessment of the vaccines promulgated by the drug regulatory authorities of advance countries and regions and WHO, the Administration was making preparations to set up an Indemnity Fund for severe adverse event associated with the administration of a vaccine.¹⁷ It was estimated that members of the public could get vaccinated through vaccination programmes on a voluntary basis free of charge starting from February 2021. The Administration would announce details of the vaccination programme in due course.

¹⁵ See footnote 7.

¹⁶ The vaccines were respectively from Sinovac Biotech (Hong Kong) Limited, BioNtech and FosunPharma, and AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford. The Administration had procured 7.5 million doses of each of the three vaccines. Under the situation where each person required two doses, the amount procured was sufficient to cover 1.5 times the Hong Kong population.

¹⁷ The Fund would cover the indemnities determined by court or arbitration and could provide in advance part of the indemnities in order to make available financial assistance to the member of the public as early as possible.

Latest development

43. The Administration will update the Panel on 5 February 2021 on its latest measures for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in Hong Kong.

Relevant papers

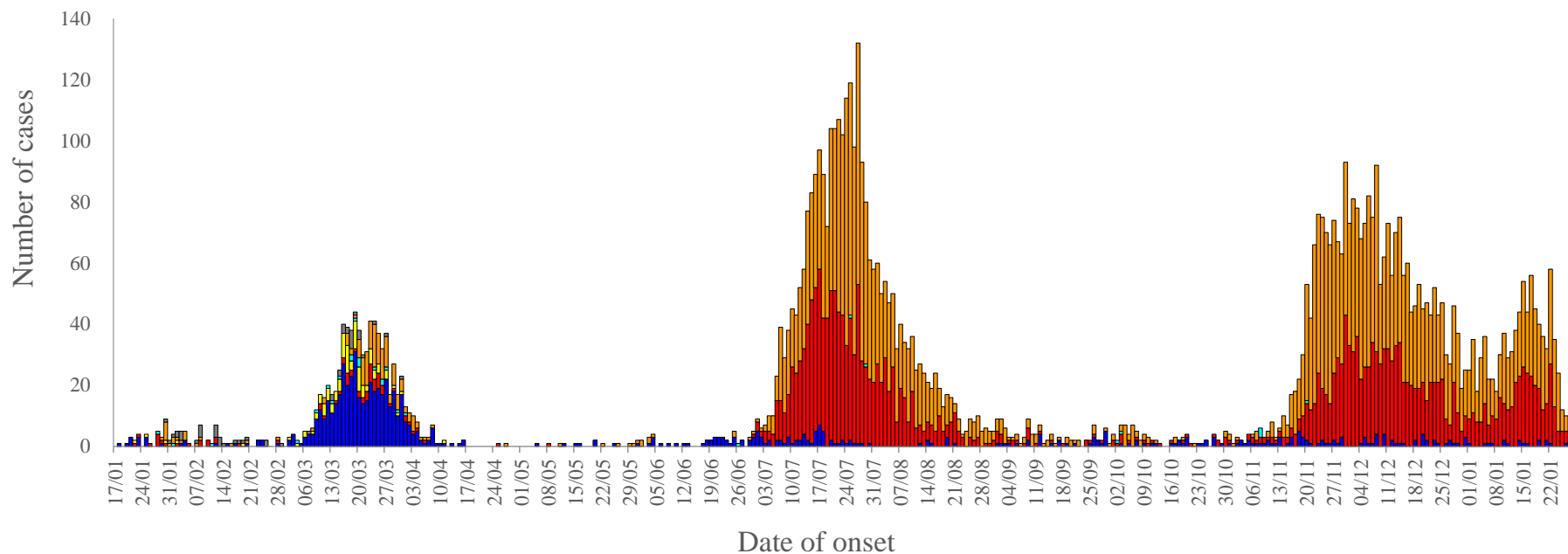
44. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 February 2021

Epidemic curve of confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Hong Kong

Epidemic curve of confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Hong Kong (as of 28 Jan 2021)

Number of confirmed and probable cases = 10322



Note:

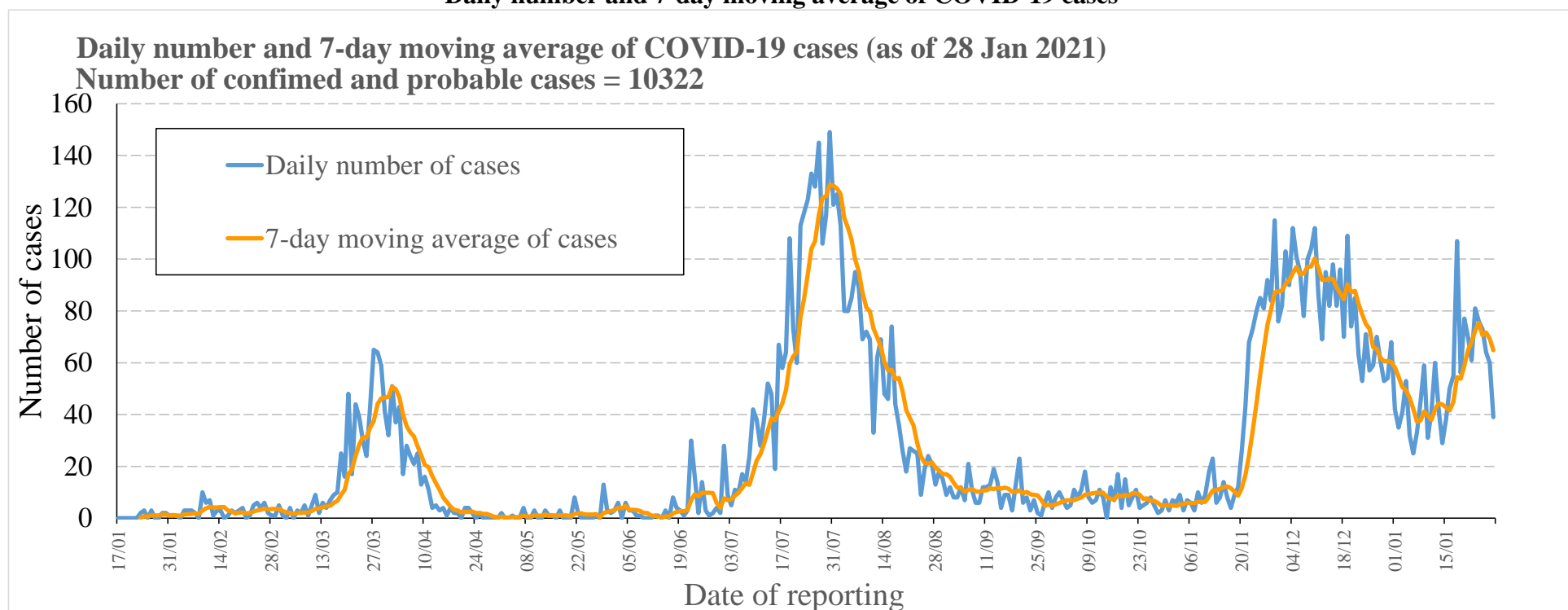
1. The case classification may be subject to changes when there is new information available.
2. Asymptomatic cases are not shown in this epidemic curve.

Number of confirmed cases by case classification

Reporting period	Imported case	Local case	Possibly local	Epidemiologically linked with imported case	Epidemiologically linked with local case	Epidemiologically linked with possibly local case	Period total
Since first reported case on 23 January 2020	1906 (18.5%)	2870 (27.8%)	103 (1.0%)	41 (0.4%)	5340 (51.7%)	62 (0.6%)	10322 (100.0%)
1/1 - 7/1	26 (10.0%)	67 (25.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	168 (64.4%)	0 (0.0%)	261 (100.0%)
8/1 - 14/1	18 (5.9%)	97 (31.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	192 (62.5%)	0 (0.0%)	307 (100.0%)
15/1 - 21/1	21 (4.6%)	164 (36.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	268 (59.2%)	0 (0.0%)	453 (100.0%)
22/1 - 28/1	22 (4.8%)	182 (40.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	250 (55.1%)	0 (0.0%)	454 (100.0%)

In the recent 7-day period from 22 - 28 January, 2021, an average of 64.9 cases were reported per day, as compared with 64.7 cases per day reported in the previous 7-day period from 15 - 21 January, 2021 (Figure 2).

Daily number and 7-day moving average of COVID-19 cases



Appendix III

Relevant papers on measures for the prevention and control of coronavirus disease 2019 in Hong Kong

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Health Services	10.1.2020 (Item IV)	Agenda CB(2)506/19-20(01)[#] CB(2)664/19-20(01)[#] CB(2)873/19-20(01) Minutes
	30.1.2020 (Item I)	Agenda CB(2)873/19-20(01) CB(2)915/19-20(01)[#] Minutes
	8.2.2020*	CB(2)601/19-20(01)
	10.3.2020 (Item I)	Agenda CB(2)873/19-20(01) CB(2)937/19-20(01)[#] Minutes
	20.3.2020 (Item IV)	Agenda CB(2)786/19-20(01) CB(2)787/19-20(01) CB(2)873/19-20(01)
	8.4.2020 (Item I)	Agenda CB(2)859/19-20(01) CB(2)873/19-20(01)
	24.4.2020 (Item III)	Agenda CB(2)938/19-20(01)^Δ CB(2)1107/19-20(01)
	8.5.2020 (Item III)	Agenda CB(2)1139/19-20(01)[#] Minutes
	10.7.2020 (Item II)	Agenda

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
	13.11.2020 (Item VI)	Agenda
	16.12.2020 (Item I)	Agenda
	22.1.2021* ^Δ	CB(4)419/20-21(01)
LegCo Meetings	8.1.2020	Urgent Question 1 - Issuing expeditiously guidelines on treating viral pneumonia Urgent Question 2 - Immediate measures to curb spread of epidemic in Hong Kong Urgent Question 3 - Enhancing measures to cope with epidemic outbreak
	19.2.2020	Urgent Question 1 - Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak Urgent Question 2 - Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak
	26.2.2020	Question 3 - Supply of anti-epidemic items Question 19 - Issues relating to novel coronavirus epidemic
	18.3.2020	Question 4 - Tackling novel coronavirus epidemic

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
		<p><u>Question 5 - Impacts of novel coronavirus epidemic on Hong Kong</u></p> <p><u>Question 6 - Supplies of anti-epidemic items</u></p> <p><u>Question 9 - Relief measures of the Government</u></p> <p><u>Question 10 - Impacts of the epidemic on schools and parents of students</u></p> <p><u>Question 14 - Issues relating to the novel coronavirus epidemic</u></p> <p><u>Question 18 - Efforts on rodent control and epidemic prevention</u></p>
	22.4.2020	<p><u>Question 21 - Using Chinese medicine to prevent and treat Coronavirus Disease 2019</u></p>
	29.4.2020	<p><u>Question 3 - Regulations made in respect of Coronavirus Disease 2019</u></p> <p><u>Question 9 - Anti-epidemic Fund relief measures</u></p> <p><u>Question 14 - Protection for employees contracting Coronavirus Disease 2019</u></p>

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
		Question 17 - Compulsory quarantine at home Question 18 - Relief measures implemented by the Government
	6.5.2020	Question 4 - Relief measures under Anti-epidemic Fund Question 10 - Quarantine arrangements amid Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic
	13.5.2020	Question 6 - Quarantine requirement for persons arriving at Hong Kong from the Mainland
	20.5.2020	Question 1 - Relief measures of the Government Question 3 - Tackling the epidemic and related matters by the Hospital Authority Question 6 - Quarantine facilities Question 19 - Relief measures amid the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic
	27.5.2020	Question 9 - Relief measures

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
		<u>Question 10 - Privacy issues related to virus testing</u>
	3.6.2020	<u>Question 16 - Provision of assistance for people not covered by relief measures</u> <u>Question 19 - Use of Chun Yeung Estate as temporary quarantine centre</u>
	10.6.2020	<u>Question 12 - Using the unoccupied Chun Yeung Estate as quarantine facilities</u>
	17.6.2020	<u>Question 10 - Measures to counter epidemics</u>
	24.6.2020	<u>Question 2 - Mutual recognition system for health codes of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao</u>
	15.7.2020	<u>Question 12 - "New normal" of co-existence with virus</u>
	28.10.2020	<u>Question 11 - Coping with the epidemic by residential care homes</u> <u>Question 17 - Statistics on the confirmed cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019</u> <u>Question 19 - Measures to boost the economy and relieve people's hardship</u>

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
	4.11.2020	Question 1 - Anti-epidemic work in private buildings Question 4 - Boosting economic recovery Question 22 - Statistics and dissemination of information on epidemic
	11.11.2020	Question 3 - Coping with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Question 14 - COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution Scheme
	18.11.2020	Question 5 - "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application
	2.12.2020	Question 3 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccines Question 6 - Relief measures
	9.12.2020	Question 13 - Government's anti-epidemic efforts
	16.12.2020	Question 1 - Anti-epidemic measures Question 8 - "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application
	6.1.2021	Question 1 - Anti-epidemic measures targeting at imported frozen goods

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
		<u>Question 3 - "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application</u> <u>Question 7 - Impacts of epidemic on students</u>
	13.1.2021	<u>Question 2 - Measures to cope with epidemic</u> <u>Question 3 - Community-wide efforts to fight the epidemic</u> <u>Question 4 - Targeted anti-epidemic measures</u> <u>Question 5 - Anti-epidemic efforts targeted at foreign domestic helpers</u> <u>Question 10 - The Government's anti-epidemic efforts</u>
	20.1.2021	<u>Question 1 - Making good use of technologies to prevent and combat epidemics</u> <u>Question 2 - Epidemic prevention in hospitals</u> <u>Question 4 - Return2hk Scheme</u> <u>Question 6 - Anti-epidemic measures</u>

Committee/Subcommittees/ Legislative Council ("LegCo") meetings	Date of meeting	Paper
		Question 19 - Anti-epidemic efforts targeted at foreign domestic helpers
	27.1.2020	Question 4 - Variants of the coronavirus Question 11 - Inspection of drainage pipes Question 19 - Support measures under Anti-epidemic Fund Question 22 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccination programmes
Subcommittee on Subsidiary Legislation Relating to the Prevention and Control of Disease	2.11.2020	Agenda
	16.11.2020	Agenda
	24.11.2020	Agenda
	16.12.2020	Agenda
	12.1.2021	Agenda
	19.1.2021	Agenda
	27.1.2021	Agenda

* Issue date

Chinese version only

^ English version to follow