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Panel on Health Services

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 July 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 2020.¹

3. 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, dry cough and fatigue.

¹ The updated number of confirmed cases, confirmed deaths and as well as countries, areas or territories with cases can be found at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

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.

4. In Hong Kong, the Centre for Health Protection ("CHP") of the Department of Health ("DH") has enhanced surveillance since 31 December 2019 in response to the emergence of the cluster of viral pneumonia cases in Wuhan.² The updates on local infection situation can be found at the webpage of CHP.³

5. The Government has been taking measures to strengthen epidemic control by guarding against the importation of cases and the resurgence of domestic infections. The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme was officially launched on 26 February 2021. Details of the latest measures implemented by the Government are laid down in the Administration's paper to be provided to the Panel (LC Paper No. CB(4)1196/20-21(03)).

Latest deliberations and concerns of Members

6. The Panel on Health Services ("Panel") discussed issues relating to the measures for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in Hong Kong at 16 meetings. The latest deliberations and concerns of members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Immigration control measures and quarantine arrangements for inbound travellers

7. 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. The Panel passed two motions at its meeting on 20 March 2020 urging the Administration to,

² 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.

³ <https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html>

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.

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 should be exempted from the 14-day quarantine requirement under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C).⁴ 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.

9. Stepping into May 2020, 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 (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) in June 2020⁵ 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

⁴ 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 4 June 2021, the subcommittee has held nine meetings and made six written reports on its scrutiny work.

⁵ See footnote 4.

different places.⁶ 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 undergoing drastic changes in early 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 Regulation⁷ ("exemption arrangements"). The Administration advised that starting from 8 July 2020, all persons exempted 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.

12. Given that the number of confirmed local cases with unknown sources had surged inexorably since November 2020, members passed a motion at the Panel 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

⁶ According to the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C), starting from 8 February 2020, except for exempted persons, all persons having stayed in the Mainland for any period during the 14 days preceding arrival in Hong Kong would be subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days, regardless of nationality and travel documents used. Since 25 March 2020, the compulsory 14-day quarantine arrangement has been extended to all persons arriving from or having stayed in Macao and Taiwan in the past 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong, in addition to those arriving from the Mainland. According to the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E), starting from 19 March 2020, except for exempted persons, all persons arriving in Hong Kong from places outside China would be subject to compulsory quarantine. Since December 2020, all persons arriving in Hong Kong (either via the airport or land boundary control points) who have stayed in places outside China on the day of arrival in Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day have to undergo compulsory quarantine for 21 days in designated quarantine hotels.

⁷ See footnote 4.

inbound travellers 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.⁸

14. Having noted the Administration's new 14-day hotel quarantine plus 7-day medical surveillance requirement for Hong Kong-based pilots and cabin crew of airlines, some members expressed concern at the Panel meeting on 5 February 2021 that the above arrangement might reduce cargo capacity.

15. The Administration advised that in response to the prevalence of the more transmissible new virus variants in some overseas places, it was imperative for the Administration to impose more stringent prevention and control measures to avert the importation of cases. The Administration would keep in view global epidemic situation and suitably adjust relevant testing and quarantine arrangements for inbound travellers and aircrew staff.

16. At the Panel meeting on 11 June 2021, some members raised concern over insufficient rooms offered by designated quarantine hotels to cater for the recent surge in demand from travellers returning to Hong Kong. The Administration responded that it had increased the supply of quarantine hotel rooms in the fourth cycle. Apart from liaising with those fourth cycle quarantine hotels to release their blocked off rooms for booking, the Administration had also secured the addition of two more designated hotels. The number of rooms that could be provided in the fourth cycle would exceed 11 000. The Administration would continue to monitor the situation.

Importation of overseas variants of virus to Hong Kong

17. According to the Administration, to address the risk of importation of mutant strains of the virus from very high-risk places, it implemented on 14 April 2021 and tightened on 29 April 2021 the place-specific flight suspension mechanism. Under the mechanism, if among all passenger flights from the same place, regardless of airline, a total of five or more passengers were confirmed positive by arrival tests for COVID-19 with the N501Y mutant strain or other relevant virus mutation which may potentially pose similar risks to Hong Kong's public health within a seven-day period, or a total of 10 or more passengers were confirmed positive by any tests (including tests conducted

⁸ With effective from 20 February 2021, all exempted persons must be subject to 'test-and-hold' arrangement.

during quarantine) with the N501Y mutant strain or relevant virus mutation within a seven-day period, the Administration will prohibit all passenger flights from that place from landing in Hong Kong, and will specify that relevant place as an extremely high-risk Group A1 specified place, so as to stop persons from the relevant place from travelling to Hong Kong via transit. Due to the need to review the epidemic situation of the place concerned, the flight suspension mechanism will not be lifted automatically.

18. At the Panel meetings on 4 and 14 May 2021, members expressed concern that the Administration had failed to react timely to guard against importation of cases. Some members commented that there had been wide media reports that the local epidemic situation in some places, such as India, Taiwan and Malaysia, had been worsening, but the Administration had been late in tightening the immigration control measures. As a result, there were risks of transmission of virus into the community. Some members noted that some cases with mutant strain were confirmed after the persons had undergone compulsory quarantine for 21 days in designated quarantine hotels. They urged the Administration to review the period of compulsory quarantine and to step up measures to prevent transmission of virus within designated quarantine hotels. There was also a view that the Administration might consider requiring all inbound travellers to undergo antibody test.

19. The Administration advised that it would implement enhancement measures to further strengthen infection control at designated quarantine hotels. For those arriving in Hong Kong, apart from undergoing the test-and-hold arrangement at the airport, they would also be subject to further tests while undergoing compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotels.

Arrangements at quarantine centres

20. Members noted that the Administration had set up quarantine centres which currently accommodated people who were close contacts of confirmed cases, but without compatible symptoms for compulsory quarantine. In April and May 2021, due to the transmission of mutant strain in the community, a number of people had to undergo compulsory quarantine at quarantine centres. At the Panel meeting on 4 May 2021, some members considered that fully vaccinated persons should be exempted from compulsory quarantine.

21. On 7 May 2021, the Administration announced the updated quarantine requirements for vaccinated close contacts of locally acquired COVID-19 cases. In brief, the duration of compulsory quarantine in a quarantine centre could be shortened provided that some criteria, such as provision of documented proof of vaccination, had been satisfied.

22. At the Panel meeting on 14 May 2021, some members expressed concern over the suspected food poisoning cases at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre and urged the Administration to improve the quarantine arrangements. The Administration responded that the caterer concerned was selected through an established mechanism. It might prosecute the caterer over alleged food contamination at the quarantine centre. It also undertook to implement measures to improve the quarantine arrangements and facilities in the future.

Viral testing capacity and community surveillance for COVID-19

23. Members were concerned about the turnaround time of the COVID-19 viral tests performed by CHP under DH and the Hospital Authority ("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. There were suggestions that the Administration should consider employing newly developed rapid tests to expedite the identification of confirmed cases and imposing a penalty on the service providers if they could not achieve the target of notifying the people receiving tests the results within 48 hours.

24. At the Panel meeting on 11 June 2021, the Administration advised that \$1.46 billion had been allocated in phases from the Anti-epidemic Fund since July 2020 to fund the cost of conducting tests for targeted groups. At present, community testing centres and mobile specimen collection stations could provide free testing services for more than 60 000 people daily.

25. 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.

26. Some members called 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.

27. 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.

28. The Administration also 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)⁹ came into operation on 15 November 2020, the Administration had published in the Gazette compulsory testing notices multiple times to require specified groups of persons 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.¹⁰

29. On the provision of voluntary testing for general public, members expressed concern that it was not easy for the public to collect specimen bottles due to high demand and the points for returning specimens were inadequate. To provide convenience to the public, members called on the Administration to increase the number of specimen bottles for collection by the public and provide more collection points for returning specimens.

30. The Administration advised that the number of specimen collection packs distributed in Hong Kong had been increased substantially. However, the number of specimen bottles collected by the Government was only around half of the amount distributed. The Administration further advised that mobile specimen collection stations also provided free testing services for asymptomatic individuals. In addition, persons of targeted groups could undergo free testing at the community testing centres, the daily testing quota at which had not been used up.

Maintaining social distancing

31. 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

⁹ See footnote 4.

¹⁰ Currently, in all districts in Hong Kong, if one or more new confirmed cases are found in the residential buildings (including buildings for both commercial and residential uses), or there are sewage samples tested positive, or there are other factors which implied possible infection risks, the buildings will be included in the compulsory testing notice.

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 2020.¹¹ The former imposed temporary measures on catering business and scheduled premises,¹² 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.

32. 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.

33. 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 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 gazetted in early December 2020 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.

34. On members' concern over the spread of the virus among foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") and their dormitories, the Administration advised

¹¹ See footnote 4.

¹² 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.

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.

35. With the implementation of tightened social distancing measures spanning across the Christmas and Chinese New Year ("CNY") holidays, members observed that the catering, public entertainment and beauty trades, among others, were hardly hit by the tightened measures. They called on the Administration to review whether there was room to suitably relax the directions and specifications under Cap. 599F¹³ in order to avoid a new wave of business closure.

36. Members subsequently noted that the Administration gazetted on 17 February 2021 directions and specifications under Cap. 599F relating to relaxation of social distancing measures in catering businesses and scheduled premises from 18 February 2021.¹⁴ In gist, two new measures had been added to operations of catering business and some scheduled premises under Cap. 599F, namely the requirement that customers had to scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code or had the specified information of their visits registered before they were allowed to enter the premises; and to arrange all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a COVID-19 test once every 14 days starting from 11 February 2021.

37. On 12 April 2021, the Chief Executive announced the new direction in fighting the pandemic. Under the new direction, the Government has adjusted social distancing measures with "vaccine bubble" as the basis. Details of the measures were announced on 27 April 2021 and came into effect on 29 April 2021.¹⁵ According to the Administration, successful implementation on the measures hinges on co-operation of the patrons or participants of the relevant activities or group gatherings in the form of compliance with the relevant entry or participation requirements in relation to vaccination, use of "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app and other requirements to cater for exceptional circumstances.

¹³ See footnote 4.

¹⁴ For details of the directions and specifications, see press release "[Government begins to relax social distancing measures in gradual and orderly manner](#)" released on 17 February 2021.

¹⁵ For details, see [Legislative Council Brief](#) issued by the Food and Health Bureau on 29 April 2021, and the [thematic webpage](#) relating to the operational details of the "vaccine bubble".

Response measures of the Hospital Authority

38. 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 to cater for operational needs during emergency situation.

39. The Administration advised that HA had expedited the procurement of PPE since January 2020 and increased the stockpiling target to six months. The current stock quantities of major PPE items were sufficient for use for more than six months.

40. 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 .

41. 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 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.

42. 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.

43. 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

44. Referring to the emergence of confirmed cases in residential care homes for the elderly ("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.

45. The Administration advised that SWD had provided all RCHEs and RCHDs with four rounds of special allowance for the procurement of PPE and sanitizing items since January 2020; distributed surgical masks for the staff of all residential service units, and all RCHEs and RCHDs for use by their residents in need; and launched an Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy under the Anti-epidemic Fund for all RCHEs and RCHDs to apply an anti-virus coating spray to their premises. 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

46. 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

47. 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.

48. Members in general welcomed the launch of the "LeaveHomeSafe" 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 "LeaveHomeSafe" among members of the public and address their concern on personal data privacy.

Maintaining environmental hygiene

49. 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

50. 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.

51. Following the continuous suspension of face-to-face classes and school activities for all kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong before the CNY holidays, the Administration announced on 3 February 2021 that all kindergartens, primary and secondary schools (including special schools and schools offering non-local curriculum) as well as schools offering non-formal curriculum (i.e. "tutorial schools") would be allowed to arrange more students to return to campuses on a half-day basis after the schools' CNY holidays, with the number of students capped at one-third of the total number of students.¹⁶ Some members enquired about the reasons for maintaining a cap on the number of students allowed in the campuses and whether advice had been sought from health experts when deciding the cap.

52. The Administration advised that there were high aspirations among parents and schools for resuming face-to-face classes as early as practicable for the benefits of all students. In this regard, the Education Bureau ("EDB") had been discussing with schools the relevant arrangements, taking into account the views of health experts as well as the latest epidemic situation and preparedness of the schools. As the epidemic situation was still prevalent, EDB would monitor the situation closely and maintain close dialogues with schools, health experts and other stakeholders and suitably adjust relevant arrangements at appropriate times. On 11 May 2021, the Administration announced whole-school resumption of half-day face-to-face class arrangements for all kindergartens as well as primary and secondary schools with effect from 24 May 2021.

Procurement and administration of vaccines

Adverse events following immunization with COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination rate

53. Members noted that under the vaccination programme led by the Government, members of the public could get vaccinated on a voluntary basis and free of charge. Members were concerned that with reported cases of suspected adverse side effects associated with vaccination, a majority of the public might not have motivation to take vaccination. Some Members suggested that the Administration should issue guidelines on the groups of people who should not be given the COVID-19 vaccines and set up a hotline for consultation by the public. Besides, some members considered that the Administration should explain clearly to the public about serious adverse events

¹⁶ The number of students was capped at two-thirds of the schools' total number of students after the schools' Easter holidays.

following immunization with vaccines to allay the public's worries. To boost the vaccination rate, some members considered that the Administration should provide incentives to encourage people to get vaccinated, including relaxing quarantine restrictions for travellers and social distancing measures, and providing financial incentives.

54. In response, the Administration advised that when entering into purchase agreements with vaccine developers, 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. 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.

55. The Administration added that it had developed and promulgated the "Interim Guidance Notes On Common Medical Diseases and COVID-19 Vaccination In Primary Care Settings".¹⁷ The guidance notes provided general principles on what conditions healthcare professionals should watch out for, especially for patients with chronic diseases. The Administration further advised the Panel on 11 June 2011 that DH also invited family doctors to participate in informative programmes to assess whether different cases were suitable for receiving vaccines. Furthermore, HA was studying whether its general out-patient clinics could offer pre-vaccination consultation for patients.

56. Some Members were concerned about whether the people concerned would be eligible for claiming the Indemnity Fund for Adverse Events Following Immunization with COVID-19 Vaccines ("AEFI Fund") if the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment following COVID-19 Immunization ("Expert Committee") had considered that the unexpected serious adverse events and the vaccination did not have direct causal association, in particular when those people had underlying diseases (e.g. 3-Highs (i.e. high blood glucose, high blood pressure and high cholesterol)).

57. The Administration advised that the Expert Committee would conduct causality assessments on all important adverse events based on guidelines by WHO. As regards the AEFI Fund, one of the conditions of claiming the Fund was that the evaluation outcome of the Expert Committee could not rule out that the event was not associated with the administration of a vaccine under the Government's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

¹⁷ www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/pdf/Guidance_Notes.pdf

Procurement and administration of vaccines, and vaccine passport

58. Members noted that as at 9 February 2021, the Government had reached agreement with three vaccine developers to procure vaccines developed from different technology platforms. The names of the three vaccines were Sinovac vaccine, BioNTech vaccine and AstraZeneca vaccine. Given the reported cases of adverse side effects associated with AstraZeneca vaccine overseas and some countries had stopped administering that vaccine, members asked whether the Administration would suspend the use of AstraZeneca vaccine.

59. The Administration advised that it had not yet authorized AstraZeneca vaccine for emergency use in Hong Kong. Given that the Sinovac vaccine and BioNTech vaccine procured and authorised for emergency use by the Government were already sufficient for vaccination by the entire population of Hong Kong, there was no need for the AstraZeneca vaccine procured earlier to be supplied to Hong Kong in 2021.

60. Some members considered that the Administration should be well prepared for resumption of cross-border travel in the future or exemption from quarantine with "vaccine passport" to facilitate Hong Kong people travelling to the Mainland and overseas. They considered that the Administration should take into account mutual recognition of the vaccine passports.

61. The Administration advised that the Innovation and Technology Bureau was studying the situation of "vaccine passport" in the Mainland and how Hong Kong would join the scheme. With the rolling out of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, members of the public could download their electronic vaccination records using the "iAM Smart" mobile app and the relevant record was also available in the Electronic Health Record Sharing System. Such electronic records could serve as proof of vaccination for Hong Kong people travelling to other places in the future.

62. Given the relatively low vaccination rate, there was a view that the Administration might consider donating unused vaccines or those which were nearing expiry to other countries in need. The Administration replied that it would liaise with WHO to see whether there was a donation mechanism in place.

Coverage of vaccination priority groups

63. Members noted that the Administration was providing vaccination for the priority groups first, including groups which had higher risks of coming into contact with the COVID-19 virus, groups which had greater mortality rates after contracting the disease, and/or groups which might easily transmit the virus to the vulnerable or weak if infected. It was the Administration's goal to provide

vaccines for the majority of the population within 2021. Taking into account the supply situation of the vaccines, some Members enquired if the Administration would consider opening up the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme to more groups of people.

64. At the Panel meeting on 12 March 2021, the Administration advised that the scope of the priority groups had been expanded to more categories of people who had greater risk of exposure to the virus and risk of infection. Members noted that scope of the priority groups had subsequently been further expanded. Currently, the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme was open to persons aged 12 and above. On 25 May 2021, the Government announced that above Programme would cover Mainland residents who were holders of the Exit-entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao and would stay in Hong Kong for a period of time. In addition, the Government was preparing for vaccination of non-refoulement claimants and refugees recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Hong Kong.

65. On extending the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme to persons aged 12 and above, members hoped that the Administration would conduct school visits to explain to students and parents about the advantages of vaccination. The Administration advised that it would conduct school visits in this regard. Besides, HA's paediatricians also explained in public on the residual defect of confirmed COVID-19 case for children.

Latest development

66. The Administration will update the Panel on 9 July 2021 on its latest measures for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in Hong Kong.

Relevant papers

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

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

A. Questions raised at the Legislative Council meetings

Date of Council meeting	Paper
8.1.2020	<u>Urgent Question 1 - Issuing expeditiously guidelines on treating viral pneumonia</u> <u>Urgent Question 2 - Immediate measures to curb spread of epidemic in Hong Kong</u> <u>Urgent Question 3 - Enhancing measures to cope with epidemic outbreak</u>
19.2.2020	<u>Urgent Question 1 - Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak</u> <u>Urgent Question 2 - Measures for tackling novel coronavirus outbreak</u>
26.2.2020	<u>Question 3 - Supply of anti-epidemic items</u> <u>Question 19 - Issues relating to novel coronavirus epidemic</u>
18.3.2020	<u>Question 4 - Tackling novel coronavirus epidemic</u> <u>Question 5 - Impacts of novel coronavirus epidemic on Hong Kong</u> <u>Question 6 - Supplies of anti-epidemic items</u> <u>Question 9 - Relief measures of the Government</u> <u>Question 10 - Impacts of the epidemic on schools and parents of students</u> <u>Question 14 - Issues relating to the novel coronavirus epidemic</u> <u>Question 18 - Efforts on rodent control and epidemic prevention</u>

Date of Council meeting	Paper
22.4.2020	<u>Question 21 - Using Chinese medicine to prevent and treat Coronavirus Disease 2019</u>
29.4.2020	<u>Question 3 - Regulations made in respect of Coronavirus Disease 2019</u> <u>Question 9 - Anti-epidemic Fund relief measures</u> <u>Question 14 - Protection for employees contracting Coronavirus Disease 2019</u> <u>Question 17 - Compulsory quarantine at home</u> <u>Question 18 - Relief measures implemented by the Government</u>
6.5.2020	<u>Question 4 - Relief measures under Anti-epidemic Fund</u> <u>Question 10 - Quarantine arrangements amid Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic</u>
13.5.2020	<u>Question 6 - Quarantine requirement for persons arriving at Hong Kong from the Mainland</u>
20.5.2020	<u>Question 1 - Relief measures of the Government</u> <u>Question 3 - Tackling the epidemic and related matters by the Hospital Authority</u> <u>Question 6 - Quarantine facilities</u> <u>Question 19 - Relief measures amid the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic</u>
27.5.2020	<u>Question 9 - Relief measures</u> <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>

Date of Council meeting	Paper
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>
4.11.2020	<u>Question 1 - Anti-epidemic work in private buildings</u> <u>Question 4 - Boosting economic recovery</u> <u>Question 22 - Statistics and dissemination of information on epidemic</u>
11.11.2020	<u>Question 3 - Coping with the Coronavirus Disease 2019</u> <u>Question 14 - COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution Scheme</u>
18.11.2020	<u>Question 5 - LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application</u>
2.12.2020	<u>Question 3 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccines</u> <u>Question 6 - Relief measures</u>
9.12.2020	<u>Question 13 - Government's anti-epidemic efforts</u>
16.12.2020	<u>Question 1 - Anti-epidemic measures</u> <u>Question 8 - "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application</u>

Date of Council meeting	Paper
6.1.2021	<u>Question 1 - Anti-epidemic measures targeting at imported frozen goods</u> <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> <u>Question 19 - Anti-epidemic efforts targeted at foreign domestic helpers</u>
27.1.2021	<u>Question 4 - Variants of the coronavirus</u> <u>Question 11 - Inspection of drainage pipes</u> <u>Question 19 - Support measures under Anti-epidemic Fund</u> <u>Question 22 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccination programmes</u>

Date of Council meeting	Paper
5.2.2021	Question 7 - Assistance for food business industry amid epidemic Question 13 - Members of public flocking to countryside amid epidemic
24.2.2021	Question 9 - Anti-epidemic measures in public hospitals Question 19 - Compulsory testing and exemptions of compulsory quarantine
17.3.2021	Question 13 - Provision of assistance for industries affected by the epidemic
24.3.2021	Question 5 - COVID-19 Vaccination Programme
21.4.2021	Question 17 - COVID-19 Vaccination Programme
28.4.2021	Question 2 - Ventilation requirement for dine-in catering premises Question 5 - Compulsory testing Question 17 - Anti-epidemic measures
5.5.2021	Question 6: Vaccination against the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Question 12: Confirmed cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 Question 16: COVID-19 virus testing services Question 22: Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccines
12.5.2021	Question 18: Coronavirus Disease 2019 testing services Question 21: Vaccination for visitors to Hong Kong
26.5.2021	Question 9: Vaccination against COVID-19 Question 16: Persons recovered from coronavirus disease 2019 receiving vaccination

Date of Council meeting	Paper
	<u>Question 17: Strategy of "preventing the importation of cases" to cope with the epidemic</u> <u>Question 20: Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccines</u>
2.6.2021	<u>Question 6: Coronavirus disease 2019 vaccines</u> <u>Question 13: Law enforcement for anti-epidemic measures</u> <u>Question 15: Quarantine arrangements</u>
9.6.2021	<u>Question 2: Encouraging members of public to receive vaccination</u> <u>Question 18: Mutual recognition of vaccination records</u>
23.6.2021	<u>Question 4: Exempting certain persons from compulsory quarantine when entering Hong Kong</u> <u>Question 13: Facilitating measures for Hong Kong people vaccinated outside Hong Kong</u> <u>Question 21: Provision of sick leave or allowance for persons undergoing compulsory quarantine</u>
7.7.2021	<u>Question 12: Encouraging members of public to get vaccinated</u> <u>Question 13: COVID-19 Vaccination Programme</u> <u>Question 18: Measures to cope with the epidemic</u>

B. Other papers

Committee/Subcommittees 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) Minutes
	8.4.2020 (Item I)	Agenda CB(2)859/19-20(01) CB(2)873/19-20(01) Minutes
	24.4.2020 (Item III)	Agenda CB(2)938/19-20(01)Δ CB(2)1107/19-20(01) Minutes
	8.5.2020 (Item III)	Agenda CB(2)1139/19-20(01)# Minutes

	10.7.2020 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
	13.11.2020 (Item VI)	Agenda
	16.12.2020 (Item I)	Agenda
	22.1.2021 * ^Δ	CB(4)419/20-21(01)
	5.2.2021 (Item III)	Agenda
	12.3.2021 (Item III)	Agenda
	9.4.2021 (Item III)	Agenda
	4.5.2021 (Item I)	Agenda
	14.5.2021 (Item III)	Agenda
	11.6.2021 (Item IV)	Agenda
Finance Committee	15.4.2021	Reply Serial Nos. FHB(H)005, 037, 041, 067, 068, 073, 091, 092, 116, 125, 126, 128, 135, 137, 150, 156, 174, 175, 184-187, 189, 191, 193-195, 204, 205, 214-216, 219, 224, 227, 230, 234-238, 241 and 242
Subcommittee on Subsidiary Legislation Relating to the Prevention and Control of Disease	-	First to sixth reports

* Issue date

Chinese version only

△ English version to follow

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