

Information provided in response to letter dated 10 May from the Clerk to Select Committee to inquire into the handling of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak by the Government and the Hospital Authority

- (a) *Who gave the instruction to perform Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test in respect of stool samples between 24 March and 27 March 2003; and*
- (b) *Whether the first positive test result on stool on 27 March 2003 means that the test results on stool has been negative from 24 March and 27 March 2003.*

The relevant information has already been provided in ^{A156} ~~SC09-19N-EW~~ as per the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau's letter (ref HWF CR/1/9/581/03 dated 30 April). Further elaborations are provided as follows.

Subsequent to the ground-breaking scientific discovery of SARS coronavirus on 22 March 2003 and the availability of the gene sequence of the virus on 24 March 2003, the Department of Health's Government Virus Unit, which was led by Consultant Medical Microbiologist Dr W. L. LIM, immediately took the initiative and commenced to design primers and develop PCR test for detecting SARS coronavirus.

As explained before, the development of a suitable PCR test for SARS coronavirus involved experimenting and testing with specimens and for the purpose, some specimens from clinically suspected SARS patients received from hospitals were used. In this context, four stool specimens from different hospitals were first used on 26 March 2003 and one of them, which came from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, yielded positive PCR result on 27 March 2003 (the results for the other three were negative).

Department of Health
May 2004