

Government announces adjustments to quarantine arrangements for inbound persons

After reviewing the latest data, the Government announced today (August 8) enhanced isolation and quarantine arrangements for inbound persons. The testing arrangements will also be correspondingly adjusted.

According to Government surveillance data, since the addition of the Day 3 nucleic acid test in early July in designated quarantine hotels (DQHs) during the quarantine period, about 80 per cent of imported cases were detected by the first two nucleic acid tests upon arrival at Hong Kong (i.e. "test-and-hold" at the airport and the Day 3 test in DQHs), among which some 50 per cent were detected by "test-and-hold" at the airport. As the overall positive case detection rate among inbound persons after the third day of quarantine in DQHs is lower than the positive case detection rate in the local community, mandating a longer period of DQH quarantine for the purpose of detecting a small number of imported cases is neither cost-effective nor precise and targeted, causing unnecessary disruption to travellers.

Considering the position of Hong Kong as an international financial and commercial centre, including the need to connect with different parts of the world for maintaining various business travels and economic activities, after analysing factors including scientific data and balancing the transmission risks, the Government decided that from August 12 (Hong Kong time), inbound persons from overseas places or Taiwan will be subject to quarantine under the "3+4" model, i.e. they will be subject to compulsory quarantine in DQHs for three days, followed by medical surveillance at home for four days, with multiple tests during medical surveillance and the monitoring period thereafter. They will be subject to Amber Code restrictions under the Vaccine Pass during medical surveillance period, and are not allowed to enter high-risk premises involving mask-off or group activities, as well as other premises requiring key protection, for more targeted management and control of infection risks.

The adjusted quarantine and testing arrangements are detailed as follows:

(1) Adjusting compulsory quarantine and medical surveillance to the "3+4" model

The quarantine arrangements for inbound persons from overseas places or Taiwan will be adjusted:

- Aligning quarantine arrangement: the day of arrival with the first nucleic acid test conducted is considered as Day 0. Inbound persons are subject to the same quarantine arrangement regardless of vaccination

status (Note 1).

- Three days of compulsory quarantine: Inbound persons are required to undergo compulsory quarantine for three nights in DQHs. Those who are consecutively tested negative can complete compulsory quarantine in the morning of Day 3.
- Four days of medical surveillance: Inbound persons are then subject to medical surveillance at home or in other self-arranged accommodation for four nights. Those who are consecutively tested negative can complete medical surveillance in the morning of Day 7.
- Continuous monitoring and testing: Inbound persons are subject to self-monitoring in the subsequent three days and daily rapid antigen tests (RATs) until Day 10, and they are required to undergo the last nucleic acid test on Day 9.

For example, if an inbound person arrives at Hong Kong on August 12, the day of arrival is Day 0. They will complete quarantine in DQH in the morning of Day 3 (August 15), and complete medical surveillance in the morning of Day 7 (August 19).

(2) Amber Code restrictions under the Vaccine Pass during medical surveillance

During the four-day medical surveillance period, inbound persons from overseas places or Taiwan can go out after obtaining negative results of RATs daily, but they will be subject to Amber Code restrictions under the Vaccine Pass:

- They cannot enter high-risk premises involving mask-off or group activities, as well as other premises requiring key protection (Note 2).
- They can conduct daily essential activities of lower risks, such as taking transport, going to work, entering supermarkets and markets, etc.

(3) Conducting more frequent nucleic acid tests and RATs

Inbound persons from overseas places or Taiwan are subject to multiple tests after arrival at Hong Kong during compulsory quarantine, medical surveillance and self-monitoring period:

- Day 0: nucleic acid test at the airport;
- Day 2: nucleic acid test in DQHs;
- Day 4, Day 6 and Day 9: after obtaining negative results of RATs on respective day, inbound persons should undergo nucleic acid tests at a community testing centre or a mobile specimen collection station, or arrange a self-paid test by professional swab sampling at a local medical institution recognised by the Government; and
- During compulsory quarantine, medical surveillance and self-monitoring period, inbound persons are subject to daily RATs until Day 10 of arrival at Hong Kong.

As regards persons who have completed at least three nights of quarantine in DQHs before the official effective date on August 12 (Friday),

i.e. persons who arrived at Hong Kong between August 3 and 8, the Government will arrange for them to leave DQHs in an orderly manner from August 9 to 12 after confirming their negative nucleic acid test results. After leaving DQHs, the relevant persons are subject to medical surveillance at home, Amber Code restrictions under the Vaccine Pass, as well as nucleic acid tests on Day 4, Day 6 and Day 9 if they have already left DQHs on those days. They should also continue to undergo RATs daily.

Streamlining procedures of boarding for Hong Kong and arrival quarantine and testing

The Government has earlier completed upgrading the electronic health declaration system and started a trial run of the enhanced electronic health declaration system since July 28. The trial has so far been running effectively.

To complement the new quarantine measures, as well as to streamline the procedures and reduce the duration that inbound persons have to stay at the Hong Kong International Airport, starting 0.00am on August 12 (Hong Kong Time), all persons boarding flights to Hong Kong from overseas places or Taiwan are required to complete the online Health & Quarantine Information Declaration of the Department of Health (www.chp.gov.hk/hdf/) in advance to declare record of completion of vaccination (Note 3) and provide relevant information such as booking confirmation at DQHs, and present the health declaration QR code generated after completion of the declaration (which can be a downloadable version of the QR code, a screen shot or a printout) at check-in for verification by airlines for boarding.

If inbound persons' vaccination declaration meets boarding requirements, they will be issued a green health declaration QR code upon successful confirmation of DQH booking information by the system. Persons holding a green health declaration QR code will not be required to further verify vaccination records and confirmation of DQH booking at check-in for their flights. Upon arrival at Hong Kong, they can also use the "express channels" with the green health declaration QR code and board the point-to-point transportation to DQHs. The system will issue quarantine orders, medical surveillance notices, vaccination records and Provisional Vaccine Pass QR codes electronically, thus saving them from presenting the documents repeatedly, and hence significantly cutting down the time they need to spend at the airport.

As for inbound persons whose vaccination declaration meets the boarding requirements but the system is unable to confirm their DQH booking information, they will be issued a pink health declaration QR code. They will be required to present DQH booking documentation upon check-in for their flights.

The quarantine and testing procedures of inbound persons at the airport is detailed in Annex.

Simultaneously rationalising quarantine and testing requirements for inbound

persons from Mainland or Macao

The quarantine requirements for inbound persons from the Mainland or Macao will be streamlined at the same time. Persons arriving at Hong Kong under the Return2hk or Come2hk Schemes will not be affected and they can continue to be exempted from compulsory quarantine (i.e. zero-day compulsory quarantine period). For other persons not arriving from the Mainland or Macao under the Return2hk or Come2hk Schemes, their compulsory quarantine period at home will be correspondingly adjusted to three nights, followed by four nights of self-monitoring on the third day of arrival at Hong Kong. During the self-monitoring period, they are required to take their body temperature twice daily and undergo compulsory nucleic acid test as required, and Amber Code restrictions under the Vaccine Pass are not applicable. For persons who arrived at Hong Kong earlier and are undergoing home quarantine, from tomorrow (August 9) onwards, they are considered to have completed home quarantine after 9am on Day 3 of arrival (i.e. persons who arrived on or before August 6) and can remove their electronic wristbands. They are required to undergo self-monitoring until Day 7 of arrival at Hong Kong. The testing requirement for all inbound persons from the Mainland or Macao are also adjusted to receiving compulsory nucleic acid tests on Day 4 and Day 6 of arrival at Hong Kong.

The Government will gazette the relevant updated specifications under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C), the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E), the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H), and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to effect the above measures.

A Government spokesman said, "Under the adjusted arrangement, the quarantine period at DQHs is appropriately shortened and the Amber Code restrictions under the Vaccine Pass are in place to restrict relevant persons from entering higher-risk premises during medical surveillance period. Relevant risks will thus be effectively managed, putting the risk of having community outbreaks induced by imported cases at a relatively extremely low level.

"The Government will not let its guard down in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic. Under the principles of science-based and targeted anti-epidemic measures, as well as the proper management of risks and citizen-focused facilitation, we will continue to adjust anti-epidemic measures as appropriate according to the epidemic developments and analyses of scientific data, in order to continue to guard against the importation of cases. We will also make use of technology to enhance procedures so as to facilitate activities and people flow essential to socio-economic recovery. It is our aim to safeguard the wellbeing of citizens while reducing the disruption to normal social activities, with a view to achieving the greatest effect with the lowest cost."

Note 1:

While the day of arrival of inbound persons at Hong Kong has been considered as Day 1 in the past, the quarantine period (especially in DQHs) is normally counted by the nights of accommodation. In other words, the day of arrival has been counted as Day 1 before the rationalisation, with the seven-day quarantine period counted from that day, where the seven-night hotel quarantine of inbound persons is completed by 0.00am on Day 8. After rationalisation, the day of arrival at Hong Kong will be Day 0 and the three-day quarantine period is counted from that day. The three-night hotel quarantine of inbound persons will instead be completed in the morning on Day 3. The relevant counting method tallies with that of local confirmed cases and close contacts, in which the day of positive test by specimen collection or the last day of contact with a confirmed case is considered as Day 0 in counting the isolation or quarantine periods.

Persons who were not fully vaccinated but were allowed to board for Hong Kong from overseas places and Taiwan were previously subject to 14-day compulsory quarantine upon arrival. The relevant arrangement will now be aligned across the board under the "3+4" model.

The existing vaccination requirement for inbound persons from overseas places remains unchanged, except for those under individual exceptional circumstances (See Note 3).

Note 2:

Premises regulated under Cap. 599F which are subject to "active checking" of the Vaccine Pass:

- Premises required to use the QR Code Verification Scanner and is regulated under Cap. 599F, i.e. catering business premises (including bars or pubs), amusement game centres, bathhouses, fitness centres, places of amusement, indoor places of public entertainment, party rooms, beauty parlours and massage establishments, club houses, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises, indoor sports premises, swimming pools, cruise ships, indoor event premises, barber shops or hair salons and religious premises.
- Premises required to inspect the Vaccine Pass visually as far as feasible, i.e. outdoor places of public entertainment, outdoor sports premises and outdoor event premises.

Other premises: residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities, schools and designated healthcare premises.

Persons holding an Amber Code who are working or studying at those premises, or receiving services at designated healthcare premises, are not subject to the restriction under the Vaccine Pass. However, their entry will also depend on whether the employers or persons-in-charge of individual premises have set

additional rules or requirements according to their needs.

Note 3:

For the purpose of inbound boarding requirements, fully vaccinated generally involves receiving two doses of the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine (CoronaVac vaccine) or the Fosun Pharma/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Comirnaty vaccine) at least 14 days before coming to Hong Kong. Persons previously infected with COVID-19 who have received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine can be considered fully vaccinated. As for persons aged between 12 and 17 on the scheduled day of departure for Hong Kong, they may be deemed to have completed the COVID-19 vaccination course on receiving one dose of the Comirnaty vaccine.

For individuals who received COVID-19 vaccines in places outside of Hong Kong and have received the required dose(s) as stipulated in the List of COVID-19 Vaccines Recognised for Specified Purposes (listed vaccines) at least 14 days prior to arrival at Hong Kong; or for those who received a combination of doses of listed vaccines, receiving a combined number of doses of the listed vaccines equivalent to the recommended number of dose(s) of one of the listed vaccines received, whichever higher the number is applicable (except in the case that the recommended dosage of one of the listed vaccines received is "1"), they will also be regarded to have completed the vaccination course of the relevant COVID-19 vaccine.

For the purpose of boarding requirements, relevant persons who are fully vaccinated, as well as children under 12-year-old accompanied by them, can board for Hong Kong. In addition, persons who (i) are unfit for vaccination due to health reasons with relevant proof from a medical practitioner; or (ii) have received one dose of recognised COVID-19 vaccine, if they were certified by a medical practitioner that they were unfit to receive the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine because of health reasons after receiving the first dose of vaccine are also allowed to board flights for Hong Kong. The relevant medical certificate must indicate the relevant health reasons in English or Chinese.