

Government makes “restriction-testing declaration” and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified “restricted area” in Yau Ma Tei

The Government today (January 26) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 7pm, by which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Yau Ma Tei (i.e. 9-27 Pitt Street and 3 Tung On Street. See Annex.) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the arrangement by the Government. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about 6am tomorrow (January 27), in order to achieve the goal of zero cases in the district with concerted efforts.

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a restriction-testing declaration."

"The Government has issued compulsory testing notices in respect of 15-27 Pitt Street and 3 Tung On Street. However, outbreaks in the area remained severe. From January 11 to 25, 2021, more than 40 confirmed cases were recorded in the above-mentioned areas, involving three buildings. The Centre for Health Protection has evacuated some residents living at Pitt Street within the 'restricted area' to quarantine centre earlier. Residents are worried of the situation."

"We are aware that those buildings in the 'restricted area' are relatively old and lack of maintenance, and many are 'three-nil buildings'. Sub-divided units are common and the infection risk in the community is quite high. The sewage samples found in the relevant buildings were also tested positive, which implied possibly infection risk. After risk assessment, we think it is necessary to issue a restriction-testing declaration for the 'restricted area' to break the transmission chain in the district and dispel the worries of residents in the district."

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before midnight today. Persons subject to compulsory testing will be arranged to undergo nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of

residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons, or make arrangement for them to self-collect and submit the deep throat saliva specimen.

"We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible at night after most people are released from work. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around 6am tomorrow with a view to allowing residents to start getting to work around 6am. The Government will make public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the case when employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not to deduct the salary or benefit from the employees.

"In the past weekend, more than 7 000 persons already underwent testing in the specified 'restricted area' in Jordan. The Government thanked them for their co-operation. However, in order to break the transmission chain in Yau Ma Tei district completely, we think it is necessary to make a new declaration for other areas in the district of which the infection risk are rather high. Persons who had undergone previous testing, including the testing under compulsory testing notices, before the declaration came into effect are still required to undergo testing again."

In order to maintain public and emergency services within the "restricted area", the Government and relevant working staff (such as healthcare officers and other officers, testing service providers engaged by the Government, cleaning service providers, etc.) are allowed to enter and leave the "restricted area" on condition that personal information and contacts are given, as well as certain infection control instructions are followed (including undergoing testing before leaving the "restricted area" without the need to wait for the test results).

The Government has prepared simple food and basic cleaning tools for the residents restricted by the declaration. The Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2572 8427) and a dedicated hotline (Tel: 3755 6816) for the ethnic minorities. The hotline services will start operation from 7pm today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government understands the residents in the district are worried and anxious because of the increase in confirmed cases in recent days. Under the epidemic, businesses in the area have been hit hard and brought to a standstill. Residents' livelihood is also affected. The Government hopes this temporary inconvenience will completely cut the local transmission chains and ease residents' worries and fear, so that they will regain confidence in resuming social and business activities in the area, and return to a normal life.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the result patiently at home. Any person who breaches the restriction-testing declaration commits an offence and may be liable to a maximum fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.