

Government makes “restriction-testing declarations” and issues compulsory testing notices in respect of specified “restricted areas” in Kwai Chung

The Government today (January 22) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make "restriction-testing declarations" (declarations) effective from 8pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted areas" in Kwai Chung (i.e. Hiu Kwai House, Yuk Kwai House and Nga Kwai House in Kwai Chung Estate. See Annex) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted areas" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing these exercises at about 10am tomorrow (January 23).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As a number of cases tested preliminarily positive/positive have been detected at Kwai Chung Estate in recent days, and the test results involved mutant strain, the risks of infection in the relevant areas are assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make 'restriction-testing declarations' for the relevant areas after the test results were found to be positive."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted areas" and requested persons subject to testing to undergo testing before 1am tomorrow. Arrangements have been made for persons subject to testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that these exercises will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted areas' as soon as possible. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercises at around 10am tomorrow. The Government will make public announcements when the declarations expire officially. In the cases in which

employees are unable to go to work because of the declarations, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted areas" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the areas when the declarations take effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

According to the compulsory testing notices to be issued today, any person who had been present at the above buildings for more than two hours from January 13, 2022 to January 22, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted areas" at the time when the declarations took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before January 24, 2022. As mutant strain is involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

In addition, in accordance with the latest arrangement, persons who resided in the same building as the case tested preliminarily positive/positive carrying variant of concern suspected to be Omicron are required to undergo compulsory testing on days 2, 3, 4, 7, 12 and 19 counting from the day subsequent to that when the relevant confirmed case last stayed in that building before being admitted to hospital for treatment or leaving Hong Kong.

The Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2835 1473) which starts operation at 8pm today for residents restricted by the declarations to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declarations". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.