

Government to gazette compulsory testing notices

The Government will exercise the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) and publish in the Gazette compulsory testing notices, which require any person who had been present on 43 specified premises during the specified period (persons subject to compulsory testing) to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) said today (December 30), "The global and local epidemic situations continue to be serious. The number of local confirmed cases has remained at a relatively high level, and cases with unknown infection sources accounted for around 35 per cent of the total number of confirmed cases in the past two weeks. The decline in the number of confirmed cases was much slower than that in the third wave of the pandemic, and the trend of progressive decline was not significant. To cut the transmission chain in the community as soon as possible, the Government has decided to expand the scope for 'compulsory testing on mandatory basis'. If confirmed cases not epidemiologically linked to each other were found in two or more units in the same building in the past 14 days, the building would be included in the compulsory testing notice under Cap. 599J. Persons who had been present at the relevant building in the past 14 days will have to undergo compulsory testing. A total of 42 buildings fulfilling the above criteria would be covered by the compulsory testing notice.

"Furthermore, the Government had earlier sponsored a multi-disciplinary team of the University of Hong Kong to conduct a preliminary study on the monitoring of the COVID-19 virus level in sewage. The study revealed that the sewage samples in Kai Fai House of Choi Wan (II) Estate constantly tested positive, which implied that persons infected with COVID-19 might be present at the relevant place, similar to the situation earlier in Fung Chak House nearby in the same estate, while Ming Lai House next to Kai Fai House had just been subject to compulsory testing. For prevention purposes and after taking into account expert views, the Government will publish a compulsory testing notice under Cap. 599J, which requires persons who had been to Kai Fai House during the specified period to undergo testing."

Details of persons subject to compulsory testing are as follows:

Any person who had been present on any specified premises listed in the Annex, for more than two hours at any time during the period from December 17 to December 30, 2020 (including but not limited to visitors, residents and workers), have to undergo testing by January 4, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing have previously undergone testing between December 28 and December 30, 2020, they would be taken to have complied with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notices.

"Based on recent experience, persons subject to compulsory testing would feel more relieved if they receive SMS (mobile phone text message) notifications confirming the negative results of the tests. Such SMS notifications can also facilitate law enforcement. Therefore, the Government has updated the testing routes applicable to compulsory testing notices, which only include those where SMS notifications confirming negative test results would be issued to persons who underwent testing afterwards. The Government will set up mobile specimen collection stations near the relevant buildings shortly, and the community testing centres near the relevant buildings will provide free testing to persons subject to compulsory testing."

Persons subject to compulsory testing may choose to undergo testing via the following routes:

1. To visit any of the mobile specimen collection stations (see the list and target groups (if applicable) at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html) for testing;
2. To attend any of the community testing centres (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/);
3. To obtain a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 121 post offices, vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations or 47 designated general outpatient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority and return the specimen to one of the designated specimen collection points (see the distribution points and times, and the specimen collection points and times, at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);
4. To undergo testing at any of the GOPCs of the Hospital Authority as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority;
5. To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories which are recognised by the Department of Health and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories_RTPCR.pdf); or
6. To use a specimen bottle distributed to the relevant specified premises by the Centre for Health Protection (if applicable), and return the specimen bottle with the sample collected as per the relevant guidelines.

The spokesman cautioned that testing received at accident and emergency departments of the Hospital Authority or during hospital stays, or testing provided by private laboratories which cannot issue SMS notifications in respect of test results, does not comply with the requirements of the aforementioned compulsory testing notices.

"If persons subject to compulsory testing have symptoms, they should seek medical attention immediately and undergo testing as instructed by a medical professional. They should not attend the mobile specimen collection stations or the community testing centres."

Persons subject to compulsory testing must keep the SMS notification containing the result of the test for checking by a law enforcement officer when the officer requires the persons to provide information about their undergoing the specified test.

Furthermore, persons subject to testing under the compulsory testing notices should, as far as reasonably practicable, take appropriate personal disease prevention measures including wearing a mask and maintaining hand hygiene, and, unless for the purpose of undergoing the specified test, stay at their place of residence and avoid going out until the test result is ascertained as far as possible.

Any enquiries on compulsory testing arrangements may be addressed to the hotline at 6275 6901, which operates daily from 9am to 6pm. If persons subject to compulsory testing plan to conduct testing at any of the community testing centres, they can check the centre's appointment status in advance. The hotlines of the community testing centres are at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/info/.

The Government will continue to trace possibly infected persons who had been to the relevant premises, and seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notice. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice 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 order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

The spokesman said, "The Government urges all individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, or individuals with infection risks (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases), to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons. The FHB will publish compulsory testing notices regarding particular groups when necessary taking into account the epidemic developments and the testing participation rate."