

LWB response to the requirement for foreign domestic helpers to receive compulsory testing and vaccination arrangement

In response to the community's concerns over the requirement for foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) to receive compulsory testing for COVID-19 and the vaccination arrangement, the Labour and Welfare Bureau today (May 1) made further explanations on the relevant arrangements.

In view of recent incidents of FDHs confirmed with infection of COVID-19 with the N501Y mutant strain, the Government announced yesterday (April 30) that all FDHs working in Hong Kong should receive compulsory testing in the period from May 1 to May 9. Given that the source of infection is unknown, it indicates that there may already be silent transmission chains of the mutant strain in the community. The compulsory testing is an important risk-based measure adopted by the health authorities in view of the evolving situation of the pandemic and is supported by public health experts. The FDH population is significant at about 370 000. Their job mainly involves taking care of family members, including the elderly and children, etc. If an FDH is infected with the virus, the employer's family members may be infected. In addition, as FDHs have regular social gatherings, coupled with the high transmissibility of the N501Y mutant strain, any infection involving FDHs might result in cross-household infections. Hence, it is necessary for the Government to mandate all FDHs to receive testing in order to completely cut any possible transmission chains in the community. Compulsory testing also applies to persons in other high-risk industries, such as staff of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes. There is no discrimination on race or status.

The Government appeals to all FDHs to receive vaccination as soon as possible in order to protect their own health and that of their employers' family and others, and to avoid being subject to any regular testing in the future. Employers should encourage and assist FDHs to receive vaccination, such as allowing sufficient rest for FDHs after receiving vaccination.

Regarding the arrangement of requiring FDHs to receive recognised vaccines when applying for contract renewal in the future, the Labour Department and the Immigration Department are working out the relevant details. If an FDH chooses to work in Hong Kong, he/she may receive the vaccination. If an FDH is unable to receive vaccination due to health reasons, he/she may be considered for exemption from the relevant requirement. As regards the medical expenses of FDHs, the employer's responsibility is the same as that under the existing regulation. According to Clause 9(a) of the Standard Employment Contract, in the event that the FDH is ill or suffers personal injury during the period of employment (except for

the period during which the FDH leaves Hong Kong of his or her own volition and for his or her own personal purposes), the employer shall provide free medical treatment. Under the prevailing policy, eligible FDHs enjoy public healthcare services at a highly-subsidised rate by the Government. In addition, under the Indemnity Fund for Adverse Events Following Immunization with COVID-19 Vaccines, an FDH could, same as other Hong Kong people, apply for financial support from the indemnity fund if he/she suffers unexpected serious adverse events associated with the vaccine. The relevant departments will make an announcement after confirming the details for the above arrangements.

The Government thanks all FDHs and their employers in Hong Kong for their understanding and co-operation with the anti-epidemic measures.