

SWD's response on requirement for RCHs on daily reporting of newly confirmed cases

In response to media enquiries about the Government's new requirement for residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for people with disabilities (RCHDs) to submit daily reports on newly confirmed COVID-19 cases at specified time, a spokesman of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) today (May 5) gave the following response:

With the severity of the fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic, it is heartbreaking that a large number of residents and staff members of the RCHEs and the RCHDs were infected at the surge of the epidemic. Although the overall epidemic situation has been subsiding recently, the risk of a resurgence of cases in the residential care homes (RCHs) is still high as can be seen from the emergence of newly infected cases in the RCHs lately and the relatively low rate of residents having received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine (as at May 4, the relevant rate in RCHEs is about 47 per cent, while that of the RCHDs is about 69 per cent). As a matter of fact, the health authorities have issued seven isolation orders and 99 quarantine orders to RCH residents from April 29 to May 3.

To effectively prevent resurgence of the disease in the RCHs, it is of paramount importance for the health authorities to keep abreast of the latest information on the new infected cases to ensure that relevant residents can be transferred to hospitals, isolation facilities or quarantine facilities in a timely manner, thereby reducing the transmission risks in the RCHs. An online platform has been set up by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health on March 31 for continuous monitoring of the infection situation of each individual RCH. Every RCH is required to submit a daily report on the new cases at specified time on each day. It is necessary for RCHs to submit the reports even if there are no additional confirmed cases on the previous day, in order to avoid causing epidemic loopholes due to the omission of reports from RCHs. The SWD is attempting to link this system to the database of RCH residents' vaccination records to provide more accurate assessments on the epidemic trends and risks as well as the response measures of individual RCHs and the sector as a whole. The establishment of these systems not only aims to prevent the resurgence of the fifth wave of the epidemic in the RCHs, but also to put in place an effective warning and monitoring system before the potential sixth wave of the epidemic hits the community.

To these ends, the SWD had issued letters to all RCHs on April 1 and April 8 respectively, requesting them to submit daily reports on the positive cases found by rapid antigen tests or newly confirmed cases on the previous day through the forms of daily reporting of new COVID-19 cases at residential care homes provided by the CHP starting from April 1. The information will help the health authorities make appropriate isolation or follow-up

arrangements for relevant residents and staff as soon as possible. The SWD has made it clear in the letter that the RCHs are still required to complete and submit the forms even if no additional confirmed cases are found. This requirement aims to avoid epidemic loopholes due to omission of reports from the RCHs, which may lead to delayed isolation arrangement and serious consequences. Meanwhile, the SWD has made amendments to the codes of practice for RCHs, requiring RCHs to strictly implement the above measures. It has repeatedly reminded each RCH/operator by phone in April to seek assistance from the SWD if they encounter any difficulties when submitting the daily report forms. Starting from April 12, 2022, the RCHs must comply with the above requirements. Otherwise, the SWD would consider issuing warning letters to the RCHs.

With the new code of practice taking effect on April 8, the SWD had provided a grace period of more than one week. For those RCHs which could not meet the requirement, the staff of the SWD had repeatedly reached them to remind them of the importance of making timely reports, and strongly appealed to the RCHs for their co-operation. As at April 19, around 90 per cent of the some 1 100 RCHs have completed the daily submissions on time, while 129 RCHs have failed to do so. The SWD therefore issued warning letters to these 129 RCHs on April 22.

The RCH sector have all along been dedicated and committed to taking care of the RCH residents. The Government is grateful for their contribution and devotion during the epidemic. The Government has also been fighting the epidemic hand in hand with the sector with the provision of different kinds of assistance. The Government is exploring and gradually implementing measures to enhance the anti-epidemic capabilities of the RCHs to fight the ongoing epidemic, and appeals to the RCH sector for their support and co-operation. The RCHs can approach the SWD for assistance and guidance whenever necessary.