

Government enforces "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Block 9, Richland Gardens, Kowloon Bay

The Government yesterday (April 2) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" effective from 3pm yesterday, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kowloon Bay (i.e. Block 9, Richland Gardens, Kowloon Bay, excluding Richland Gardens Management Office) were 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 area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. All persons in the "restricted area" who have tested positive in the past three months, including positive cases identified either by nucleic acid tests recorded by the Department of Health (DH) or by rapid antigen tests that have been self-declared to the DH, were not required to undergo testing in this compulsory testing exercise.

Moreover, the Government issued a compulsory testing notice yesterday to any persons, other than those specified above, who had been present at the building for more than two hours from March 20 to April 2, 2022, to undergo compulsory testing on or before April 4, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect.

The Government finished the compulsory testing exercise at around 10am today (April 3) and is now carrying out enforcement actions in the "restricted area" to verify that all people in the "restricted area" have undergone compulsory testing. The Government will further announce the revocation time of the declaration.

Starting from around 10am today, persons in the specified "restricted area" in Kowloon Bay who have undergone testing and are able to present SMS notifications with negative test results or wear wristbands as proof of having undergone testing may leave the "restricted area" through the designated exit after providing personal information to a prescribed officer.

The Government set up temporary specimen collection stations in the "restricted area" yesterday and requested persons subject to compulsory testing to collect combined nasal and throat swab samples at the stations to undergo a COVID-19 virus test before 9pm yesterday. A total of 474 people within the "restricted area" had undergone testing, among which four cases tested positive. The Centre for Health Protection of the DH will arrange to

follow up.

Regarding cases tested positive in the specified "restricted area", the Government has provided additional food packs and disinfection products to these persons and their household members pending follow-up arrangement.

Moreover, the Government also assigned staff to visit 264 households in the "restricted area", among which 32 households did not answer the door. The Government will take measures to follow up.

The Government reiterates that enforcement actions will be taken seriously. Any person who fails to present an SMS notification with a test result or wear a wristband as proof of having undergone testing breaches the compulsory testing notice and may be liable to a fine of \$10,000. The person will also be issued with a compulsory testing order, requiring him/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 may be liable to a fine of level 5 (\$50,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Key statistics on service demand of A&E Departments and occupancy rates in public hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

During the winter surge, the Hospital Authority closely monitors the service demand of Accident and Emergency Departments and the occupancy rates in public hospitals. Key service statistics are issued daily for public information. Details are in the appended table.

Red fire danger warning

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

The fire danger situation today (April 3) is red and fire risk is extreme. The countryside is extremely vulnerable to fire. If you are planning to spend the day in the countryside, please take pre-cooked food for a picnic and take all measures to prevent hill fires. The penalty for lighting fires

illegally in the countryside is \$25,000 and a year's imprisonment.

Government provides COVID-19 oral drugs to private doctors

The Government announced on April 2 that it would gradually provide free COVID-19 oral drugs, namely Paxlovid and Molnupiravir, to private doctors with a view to enabling private doctors to prescribe these two COVID-19 oral drugs to suitable COVID-19 patients.

"Our top priority now is not only to suppress the epidemic and reduce infection, but also to strengthen the protection for the elderly and children, and to reduce the numbers of severe cases and deaths caused by the epidemic. As the guardians of Hong Kong's public health and the well-being of our citizens, all healthcare professionals in Hong Kong have an obligatory duty to stand at the forefront of the fight against the epidemic and to mobilise all available manpower to support various anti-epidemic measures. In addition to enlisting support from private hospitals and private doctors in the fight against the epidemic in different roles earlier, we also call upon private doctors to help treat the patients, especially high-risk ones, to reduce the risk of deterioration of their clinical conditions," a spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said.

At present, the Hospital Authority (HA) prescribes the two COVID-19 oral drugs Paxlovid and Molnupiravir to patients at various facilities, including HA hospitals, community treatment facilities, designated clinics and residential care homes for the elderly. The nursing team from the Patient Support Call Centre of the HA also proactively contacts patients of the high-risk groups for prescription of the oral drugs at designated clinics. To extend support to more COVID-19 patients, the HA has been providing COVID-19 drugs, including the two oral drugs, to private hospitals and doctors in holding centres. As at April 1, the HA has prescribed Paxlovid and Molnupiravir to over 7 100 and 15 800 patients respectively. The HA will continue to provide clear and succinct information and guidelines on the oral drugs to doctors through different channels to assist them in prescribing the COVID-19 oral drugs to patients.

Private doctors should accord priority to support and treat high-risk patients as far as practicable, including elderly aged 60 or above, children aged 5 or below, women at 28 or more weeks of pregnancy, and immunocompromised patients such as organ transplant recipients and those with immune system disorders or long-term use of immunosuppressive drugs. Private doctors should not charge patients any fee for the COVID-19 oral drugs.

The Government is optimising relevant computer systems, including the Electronic Health Record Sharing System, to allow private doctors to register

the information of patients who have been prescribed COVID-19 oral drugs. The Government will issue letters to private doctors in due course to explain the arrangements such as drug distribution and registration of patient information.

Government provides free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing service for the elderly and targeted groups

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) announced today (April 2) that the free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing service is being provided for eligible persons of high-risk/high-exposure targeted groups and all elderly people aged 70 or above at community testing centres (CTCs) and mobile specimen collection stations so as to achieve the goal of "early identification, early isolation and early treatment" and enable more vulnerable infected elderly to seek timely medical attention and be prescribed with treatment drugs.

In view that the fifth wave of the epidemic has remained dire in recent days, the overall transmission risk is still high with a large number of transmission chains remaining in the community. Several thousands of newly infected cases continue to be reported each day, and infected cases were recorded in all districts in Hong Kong and almost all buildings in the past seven days. The risk of serious illness and death upon contraction of COVID-19 is very high for the elderly, in particular those aged 70 or above and not yet vaccinated. Among the death cases recorded during the fifth wave of the epidemic, almost 90 per cent are elderly people aged 70 or above, with around 70 per cent of whom having yet to be vaccinated. Specifically, there have been one death case out of about six infected elderly aged 80 or above and not yet vaccinated, and one death case out of every 18 infected elderly aged 70 to 79 and not yet vaccinated. At the same time, a reduction in fatality rate of infected elderly who have taken three doses of vaccine by at least 10 times has been observed. Moreover, the capacity for the healthcare system to provide medical support and treatment for the elderly has been substantially enhanced, and the Government has also procured sufficient doses of COVID-19 oral drugs which can considerably reduce the risk of serious illness or death when taken during the early stages of onset of illness.

The Government strongly appeals to the elderly, especially those aged 70 or above and not yet vaccinated, to receive early vaccination for protecting themselves and to undergo testing for effective and early identification of infection, so that they can seek timely medical attention and receive suitable diagnosis and treatment. The elderly are encouraged to make use of the rapid antigen test (RAT) kits in the anti-epidemic service bags distributed from today onwards by the Government to conduct testing on their

own. They should also put on the KN95 masks provided in the service bags when they go out or receive visitors at home. Taking into account the need of the elderly, the Government will provide free COVID-19 nucleic acid test with swab samples collected by professionals at around 100 CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations in various districts of Hong Kong for all elderly aged 70 or above without the need for booking in advance. Elderly people tested negative (whether by RAT or nucleic acid test) should seize the time and visit any nearby community vaccination centres to get vaccinated immediately under the "same-day tickets" arrangement, via private doctors and clinics offering vaccination service or at mobile vaccination stations. Details on vaccination service can be found on the Government's thematic website for the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en), or solicit assistance from family and friends, district organisations or elderly service institutions to make enquiry and arrangement.

Meanwhile, the Government will continue to conduct large-scale COVID-19 testing for staff of individual sectors under high-risk/high-exposure groups (targeted group persons) in order to cut off transmission chains as quickly as possible and allow normal operation of the relevant industries. The regular compulsory testing of all targeted group persons, whether they have completed a vaccination course or not, must be done by using combined nasal and throat swabs collected by professionals. The arrangement is applicable to all full-time and part-time staff of relevant industries. Given the higher infection risks of targeted group persons, only those who have tested positive in the past month (including positive cases tested either by nucleic acid tests recorded by the Department of Health (DH) or by RATs that have been self-declared to the DH) can be temporarily exempted from undergoing the above regular nucleic acid compulsory testing.

In general, only targeted group persons who are vaccinated or those who are unfit for vaccination because of health reasons are eligible for receiving free COVID-19 testing at CTCs. They must present valid medical certificates/vaccination records/documents of identity proof (see Notes) for receiving free tests. In other words, persons of targeted groups will need to pay \$240 for the regular testing service if they do not fall under the category of being unfit for vaccination because of health reasons. The specific requirements for eligible persons of various targeted groups (including testing frequency, specimen requirement, conditions for receiving free test) are set out in the Annex. In accordance with the revision of testing requirement by the Education Bureau for school staff who have not yet taken the first dose of vaccine, the frequency for eligible school staff to undergo free testing at CTCs is now changed to once every seven days.

Moreover, the CTCs also continue to provide free voluntary nucleic acid testing service for staff members of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes who are fully vaccinated (can receive a free nucleic acid test every seven days on a voluntary basis) and personnel working in markets and licensed hawkers (can receive a free nucleic acid test every 28 days on a voluntary basis).

The free testing arrangement will be available until the end of April.

The Government regularly reviews the coverage and frequency of targeted group testing and if such testing should be publicly funded based on the latest epidemic risk assessment. A spokesman for the FHB said that the provision of free tests for targeted groups involves the use of public resources. Given that the Government must uphold the principle of effective use of resources, public money should only be used to subsidise individual eligible persons for taking nucleic acid tests in very exceptional situations.

The spokesman said, "The provision of free nucleic acid test for the elderly and targeted groups and the systematic promotion of RAT to all members of the public (including the appeal for all to conduct RATs every day from April 8 to April 10) can assist the Government in gauging the situation of local infection and providing appropriate isolation arrangement or treatment for the infected people to reduce the spread of the virus in the community or household."

Notes:

(i) Persons who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of health reasons are required to present a relevant medical certificate;

(ii) persons who are vaccinated (i.e. have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, or received the second dose but have not yet passed 14 days, or completed a vaccination course of two doses) should present a relevant vaccination record (such as by downloading their electronic vaccination records or saving the printouts of their vaccination records to their mobile phones, or bringing along the printouts or copies of their vaccination records); and

(iii) certain groups should also present card/letter/document proof issued by relevant organisations for verification of identity.