

60th and 61st rounds of compulsory testing for staff members of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes

The Government today (April 27) announced the details of the 60th and 61st rounds of compulsory testing for staff members of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) and nursing homes.

In accordance with section 10(1) of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J), the Secretary for Food and Health issued a compulsory testing notice yesterday (April 26), requiring persons who are employed by and will be on duty at RCHEs, RCHDs, nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of residential care homes during specified periods, or who will provide services to residents or users through hire-of-service contracts with residential care homes and the aforementioned units during specified periods (including full-time, part-time and relief staff), to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 according to the requirements and procedure set out in the notice (the Specified Test). The samples must be collected by using combined nasal and throat swabs and must not be taken by the person to be tested. The relevant details are set out below:

(1) persons who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course and will be on duty or provide services from May 4 to 10, 2022, at the aforementioned residential care homes or units must undergo the Specified Test once during the period from April 27 to May 10, 2022;

(2) persons who have not completed a COVID-19 vaccination course and will be on duty or provide services from May 4 to 10, 2022, at the aforementioned residential care homes or units must undergo the Specified Test once during the period from April 27 to May 3, 2022; and

(3) persons who have not completed a COVID-19 vaccination course and will be on duty or provide services from May 11 to 17, 2022, must undergo the Specified Test once during the period from May 4 to 10, 2022.

In the compulsory testing notice issued yesterday, completion of a COVID-19 vaccination course refers to having received the second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine on or before April 19, 2022. For persons previously infected with COVID-19, completion of a vaccination course means having received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine on or before April 19, 2022. For persons who received COVID-19 vaccines in places outside Hong Kong and have received all of the recommended dose(s) of a COVID-19 vaccine on or before April 19, 2022, they will also be regarded to have completed the vaccination course of the relevant COVID-19 vaccine, subject to the vaccine used being included on the list of vaccines recognised for specified purposes as published on www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/list_of_recognised_covid19_vaccines.pdf.

The staff of institutions who had obtained a positive test result in a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test or rapid antigen test for COVID-19 on or after March 28, 2022, are not required to undergo testing in accordance with the requirements of the notice provided that they can produce the relevant SMS (mobile phone text message) notification containing the positive result of the test, or the relevant SMS notification or isolation order issued after making a declaration on the Government's Declaration System for Individuals Tested Positive for COVID-19 Using Rapid Antigen Test.

The staff of institutions who are required to undergo the Specified Test may choose the following means:

- (1) To undergo the Specified Test in any of the Community Testing Centres (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en), Temporary Testing Centres (if any) (see the list at www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_supportser/sub_ttc), or mobile specimen collection stations (if any) (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html) in accordance with the instructions given by the staff at the centre/station;
- (2) To have a sample collected by a healthcare professional or trained personnel as arranged by institution operators at a laboratory listed on the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories RTPCR.pdf); or
- (3) To self-arrange testing provided by a laboratory listed on the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" at their own expense (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories RTPCR.pdf) and the sample through a combined nasal and throat swab must not be taken by the person himself or herself.

Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice commits an offence and may be subject to a fixed penalty of \$10,000. He or she 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 5 (\$50,000) and imprisonment for six months.

A spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said that the SWD and the Department of Health would issue letters to institutions to inform them of the relevant arrangements and requirements. The spokesman reminded staff of the said institutions who will undergo testing at community testing centres that they should make an advance booking via the community testing centre booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk) for the free testing service. In addition, institution operators should remind their staff members to properly keep the SMS notifications of their test results or their test result reports.

Institution operators are required to keep records of their staff having received the Specified Test and the results within the time frames specified

by the Government. They are also required to keep the list of staff members who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course. Institution operators also have to co-operate with Checking Officers (Compulsory Testing) of the SWD who are enforcing the Regulation at residential care homes.

The SWD spokesman said that starting from the 26th round of compulsory testing, staff members who have not been vaccinated and do not have medical certificates certifying that they are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination owing to health reasons have had to undergo compulsory testing at their own expense. The Government will continue to monitor the epidemic situation and make adjustments to the aforementioned testing policy after taking the overall anti-epidemic measures into account.

LCQ8: Simplifying procedure for enterprises to apply for various funding schemes

Following is a question by the Hon Sunny Tan and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (April 27):

Question:

Currently, the Government has put in place a number of funding schemes in support of the commercial and industrial sectors as well as micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). However, some members of the sectors have relayed to me for a number of times that the application procedure of such funding schemes and the relevant procurement requirements have failed to keep up with the times (for example, applying for different funding schemes entails the repeated filling in of the company addresses and the information as set out on the business registration certificates), and therefore such funding schemes are unable to provide timely relief for MSMEs. Some enterprises have even discarded the idea of applying for funding due to the cumbersome procedure. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider simplifying the application procedure and procurement requirements of the various funding schemes, and requiring that the vetting and approval of applications involving funding amounts of less than \$100,000 must be completed within three weeks;

(2) whether it will make use of innovative technologies to streamline the process of applying for the various funding schemes; if so, of the details; and

(3) given that the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer is working with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority to develop the business version of the "iAM Smart" digital authentication platform, whether the Government has drawn up a timetable for launching the platform and whether it will, before the launch of the platform, instruct the relevant government departments to study how to use the platform to simplify the procedure for enterprises to apply for the various funding schemes?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Innovation and Technology Bureau, our consolidated reply is as follows:

The Government strives to provide comprehensive support to Hong Kong enterprises, including assisting them in developing brands, exploring markets, enhancing technological level and competitiveness. Having regard to the economic situation and needs of the trade, the Government reviews the various funding schemes from time to time, with a view to launching timely enhancement measures and streamlining application procedures with the use of innovative technology. Details are summarised below:

(1) the SME Export Marketing Fund has introduced several measures to facilitate enterprises in submitting applications, including providing online application service, simplifying the application form, and relaxing the requirements for submitting supporting documents by applicant enterprises;

(2) the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales (BUD Fund) has in the past two years introduced various new measures including accepting online submission of applications and project reports; waiving the requirements of opening and maintaining a separate interest-bearing bank account by a grantee and depositing into the account the matching fund before receiving the initial payment; allowing an enterprise to commence its project after application submission but prior to the announcement of approval result (yet funding will be provided only when the application is eventually approved); relaxing the budget cap of individual expenditure items; and expanding item coverage eligible for funding, etc.;

(3) enhanced the application process and experience under the BUD Fund through design thinking, by providing enterprises with lucid information on the website through the use of tools such as graphic illustration of the process, checklist of required documents, reference cases and progress tracking, and assisted enterprises in developing project plans, with a view to encouraging their utilisation of Government funding. These functions have been well received by applicant enterprises since their launch in June 2021;

(4) funding schemes under the Innovation and Technology Fund have established electronic channels. Enterprise, organisation and individual applicants could submit applications and reports, and change requests, etc. through the

Innovation and Technology Commission Funding Administrative System, without having to submit documents in paper form in person, so as to speed up the approval process; and

(5) the SME ReachOut, launched in January 2020, helps small and medium enterprises identify suitable funding schemes and answer questions relating to applications. So far over 11 000 enquiries have been handled via phone, email or in-person, and around 150 events have been held to promote Government funding schemes through seminars and visits to chambers of commerce, etc.

Procurement requirements for funded projects have been drawn up for Government funding schemes to ensure that procurements are conducted by enterprises in a competitive, open, equitable and economic manner in accordance with prudent commercial principles, with a view to safeguarding the proper use of public funds. For instance, for certain funding schemes, applicant enterprises should ensure that a probity clause and an anti-collusion and anti-bid-rigging clause are included in the quotation/tender invitation document. The relevant requirements seek to ensure that applicant enterprises would adhere to the principles of openness, fairness and value for money in the procurements in relation to or for the purposes of the project.

The Government will continue to review the operation of various funding schemes from time to time, proactively explore the feasibility of further streamlining application procedures, approval process and procurement requirements, and provide more appropriate support to enterprises having regard to the various Government digitisation measures. Performance pledges have been set for the application processing time of certain funding schemes. However, as the operation of individual funding schemes varies, it may not be suitable to set a unified processing time for applications of a specific funding amount.

The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) have completed the first phase of Proof-of-Concept (PoC) trials and research on the business version of the "iAM Smart" platform in the second quarter of 2021, and are currently exploring the feasibility of devising a sustainable development proposal through a public-private partnership approach based on the PoC results. To this end, the OGCIO and the HKMA will explore with stakeholders various issues in respect of digital authentication of business identities, including the industry players' acceptance of the proposed solution, the application coverage, the governance framework of the platform and the detailed implementation plan. A trial run of sandbox will also be conducted for assessing the system security, the protection of users' privacy and the compatibility with relevant platforms in other jurisdictions, etc. with a view to working out the feasibility of the proposed solution's sustainable development, as well as to performing the corresponding legal and regulatory consultation. The implementation timetable, scope and the bureaux and departments to be involved will be decided then.

Temporary closure of tennis courts at Shek Ku Lung Road Playground

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (April 27) that the tennis courts at Shek Ku Lung Road Playground in Wong Tai Sin District will be temporarily closed from May 3 to August 31 for resurfacing works. During the closure period, the public may use similar facilities at Choi Hung Road Playground, Ma Chai Hang Recreation Ground or Morse Park (Park No. 4) in the same district.

For the most up-to-date closure schedules of the above leisure and sports facilities, the public may refer to the notices at the venue or contact venue staff directly.

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Hong Yam House, On Yam Estate, Kwai Chung

The Government today (April 27) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 3pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kwai Chung (i.e. Hong Yam House, On Yam Estate, Kwai Chung, 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 area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at around 11am tomorrow (April 28). The operation may be extended depending on test results.

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. Having reviewed a basket of factors, including the viral load in sewage, the information of relevant positive cases, and other

circumstantial factors, and conducted a risk assessment, the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area."

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 9pm today. Arrangements will be made for persons subject to compulsory 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 compulsory 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. 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, will not be required to undergo testing in this compulsory testing exercise.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' 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 exercise at around 11am tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes 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 notice to be issued today, any persons other than those specified above who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from April 21 to April 27, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before April 29, 2022. As a mutant strain is involved, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

For the 2022 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) candidates who are within the "restricted area" and need to sit the HKDSE on the following day, or examination personnel who need to take up invigilation duties for HKDSE on the following day, the Government appeals to them to go to the temporary specimen collection stations setup within the "restricted area" before 8pm today and present to the prescribed officer the

relevant documents (including the identification documents and HKDSE admission forms, or a certification letter issued by the school of the examination personnel) proving their identities. These HKDSE candidates and examination personnel will be given priority testing with a view to enabling them to obtain test results on the following day as early as possible. The priority testing arrangement also applies to the family members who live together with these HKDSE candidates and examination personnel, so as to identify those HKDSE candidates and examination personnel who have become close contacts of confirmed cases for making quarantine arrangement.

If any HKDSE candidate or examination personnel needs to leave the "restricted area" for the examination centre before the declaration is revoked, he/she can make a request to the prescribed officers within the "restricted area". The prescribed officer may allow the candidate or the examination personnel to leave the "restricted area" after verifying his/her testing result(s) and recording the relevant information. For the safety of all candidates and examination personnel, only those candidates and examination personnel who have obtained negative test results will be allowed to enter the examination hall. For details, please read the relevant information issued by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority earlier www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/PPT_2022DSE_compulsory_testing_arrangements_eng.pdf.

The Government has set up a hotline (Tel: 6232 1772) which started operation at 3pm today for residents restricted by the declaration 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 declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$10,000. 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 5 (\$50,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Government follows up on positive results of sewage surveillance and

appeals to residents to undergo virus testing

The Government announced today (April 27) that in order to fight the coronavirus epidemic, the Environmental Protection Department and the Drainage Services Department in collaboration with the cross-disciplinary team of the University of Hong Kong had strengthened the sampling of sewage for virus testing in all districts, and had detected positive results in many areas, indicating that there may be hidden cases in the premises within these areas.

Rapid test

As regards positive sewage testing results with relatively high viral loads in the following areas, the Housing Department and the respective District Offices will commence distributing about 210 000 sets of the COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits to residents, cleaning workers and property management staff working in the following areas for them to take the test on their own, in order to help identify infected persons:

- Islands District – Caribbean Coast (Albany Cove, Carmal Cove, Monterey Cove, Crystal Cove and La Mer), Coastal Skyline ((i) Coastal Skyline, (ii) Le Bleu Deux, (iii) Le Bleu and (iv) La Rossa) and Seaview Crescent
- Wong Tai Sin District – Tin Wang Court, Tin Ma Court, Chuk Yuen (South) Estate and Tsui Chuk Garden
- Kwun Tong District – Tsui Ping (South) Estate

Members of the public may refer to (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/rat/eng/rat.html) for enquiries relating to the use of the RAT kits.

When using an RAT kit, please pay attention to and follow the instructions from the manufacturer to perform the test and read the result properly. It is advisable to record the displayed result by taking a photo immediately after reading. Users should wash their hands before and after performing the tests, and avoid placing non-essential items within the specimen collection area. After completing the test, wrap and seal all components of the test kit carefully and dispose properly. If the household environment is contaminated during the specimen collecting process, disinfection should be conducted with 1 in 49 diluted bleach solution or 70 per cent alcohol.

People who obtained a positive result through an RAT for the first time can report via the online platform "Declaration System for individuals tested positive for COVID-19 using Rapid Antigen Test" (www.chp.gov.hk/ratp). If individuals encounter difficulties using the online platform, they can call the automated system at 183 6119 to register their identification document and telephone number. The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of

Health will contact the relevant person later to finish the report procedure.