

Government enforces "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Sai Ying Pun

The Government yesterday (March 17) 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 7.15pm yesterday, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Sai Ying Pun (i.e. Kwan Yick Building Phase III, 271-285 Des Voeux Road West, Sai Ying Pun) 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 area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. In addition, the Government had issued a compulsory testing notice yesterday to any person who had been present at the buildings for more than two hours from March 4 to 17, 2021, to undergo compulsory testing on or before March 19 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 7am today (March 18) 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 7am today, persons in the "restricted area" in Sai Ying Pun 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 2am today. As at 2am today, around 1 800 residents had undergone testing. No confirmed cases were found.

Moreover, the Government also assigned staff to visit around 775 households, around 70 households did not answer the door. Those include some households with confirmed case or undergoing quarantine. Some units are possibly vacant as well. The Government does not have detailed information in this respect and will take measures to follow up.

The Government also understands that some residents already underwent testing at the mobile specimen collection stations set up in the district or by other means. Therefore, persons in the "restricted area" who have undergone testing from March 15 to 17, 2021, and are able to provide the SMS

notification through mobile phone or related certification containing the test results, are not required to take the test again.

The Government reiterates that enforcement actions will be taken seriously. Any person who fails to present an SMS notification with a negative 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 \$5,000. 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 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Government responds to use of COVID-19 vaccines

A Government spokesman said on March 17, the Government has noticed that individual organisations used the name of medical professionals to claim that the Sinovac vaccine has insufficient data, thus shaking public confidence in vaccination. The spokesman pointed out, all COVID-19 vaccines used in Hong Kong are authorised for emergency use in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Use of Vaccines) Regulation (Cap. 599K) (the Regulation) in order to ensure that the relevant vaccines meet the requirements of safety, efficacy and quality.

The spokesman stressed that vaccination is an important public health measure to control COVID-19 effectively. The public health authorities have all along been implementing the vaccination programme based on scientific evidence and in adherence to the principles of openness and transparency, providing members of the public with the choice of vaccines from different technology platforms. Faced with the raging epidemic, the community should work together to fight the virus. We encourage citizens to actively get vaccinated so as to protect themselves, their families, the healthcare system, and even the whole population. Medical professionals should, following the spirit of protecting public health and the principle of adhering to medical evidence, explain to the public the benefits and risks of getting vaccinated. No political considerations should be involved. Individual organisations which used the name of medical professionals to, based on political stance, spread rumours to the public regarding vaccination and target individual vaccines attempting to smear the vaccination programme and mislead citizens to resist getting vaccinated are placing individual political gains on top of public health. Such behaviour should be condemned.

In accordance with the Regulation, the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH), after making reference to the advice of the Advisory Panel on COVID-19

Vaccines (Advisory Panel) and having considered the threat to public health posed by COVID-19, considers that the authorisation of the Sinovac vaccine is necessary and in the public interest. SFH has authorised the emergency use of the relevant vaccine in Hong Kong according to the Regulation.

According to the information provided by Sinovac to the Advisory Panel, in the Phase 3 clinical trials conducted in Brazil (mainly targeting around 12 000 healthcare workers aged above 18, including around 600 elders aged above 60, who have contact with COVID-19 patients), for the around 10 000 trial participants who received two doses of the Sinovac vaccine, the overall vaccine efficacy was 50.65 per cent after 14 days. The results indicated that, in the clinical trials, comparing subjects who received the vaccine and those who did not, receiving the vaccine could lower the risk of developing symptomatic COVID-19 by 50.65 per cent. The above analysis encompassed only groups who experienced mild symptoms without the need for medical attention. As regards the groups who experienced symptoms and required medical attention or had more severe conditions, the efficacy of the Sinovac vaccine was 83.7 per cent. The efficacy for preventing hospitalisation and serious cases involving severe conditions or even death reached 100 per cent. However, the relevant case numbers are relatively fewer, hence further study would be necessary for confirmation.

The procedures for the Advisory Panel to examine the information and data and the Government to approve the authorisation are stringent and comprehensive. The procedures met all the relevant requirements under the Regulation and were no different from those adopted for approving another vaccine for emergency use in Hong Kong (Comirnaty) earlier.

As regards the use of the Sinovac vaccine on people aged 60 or above, according to the information provided by Sinovac, the Sinovac vaccine was suitable for preventive vaccination for people aged 18 or above. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (Joint Scientific Committee) under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) and the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel examined the available information and data having regard to the information provided by Sinovac to the Advisory Panel. They considered that the benefit of using Sinovac vaccine generally exceeds the risk of not using any vaccines in persons aged 60 or above.

According to the information provided by the drug manufacturer, so far over 40 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine have been administered around the world. According to statistics derived from the clinical trials of the Sinovac vaccine, so far there is no evidence indicating a direct causal relationship between receiving the relevant vaccine and a number of very severe adverse events such as death cases. As regards the severe adverse events in Hong Kong which occurred after receiving COVID-19 vaccines, in accordance with the DH's pharmacovigilance system, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation (Expert Committee) will conduct causality assessments on all important adverse events based on guidelines by the World Health Organization when necessary information for the cases is available. So far, the assessment results of the Expert

Committee have not indicated any causal relationship between death cases and the administration of vaccines. Put in simple terms, from the medical professional and science perspectives, so far there is no evidence pointing to the need for us to cast doubt on the safety of the two COVID-19 vaccines now made available to citizens. The relevant vaccines are effective and of good quality.

Hospital Authority clarification on news report about unpleasant experience and alleged use of physical restraint on paediatric patients during hospitalisation

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

Regarding a news report about unpleasant experience and alleged use of physical restraint on paediatric patients during hospitalisation, the Hospital Authority made the following clarification today (March 17):

Generally speaking, the hospital will only consider the application of physical restraint on paediatric patients for the safety and well-being of the patient. Appropriate and prior consent will be sought from the parents or guardians. There is no question of parents not knowing so beforehand.

As regards whether children would be admitted to hospital alone, the hospital will, as a standing practice, also provide option for the parents, who are tested negative to COVID-19, to accompany their confirmed children to stay in the same isolation room, subject to the agreement of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health and the availability of isolation capacities.

The hospital will explain the risk of contracting the infection to the parents. Essential infection control precautions and personal protective equipment will be provided. Due to infection control consideration, the parents will be required to undergo an additional quarantine period under CHP after the paediatric patients are discharged.

Hospital will always take into account the interests of paediatric patients and their families, and cater for the special needs of the patients as far as possible during hospitalisation.

Latest figures for private doctors and clinics enrolled in COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

With the implementation of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the Department of Health (DH) started distributing Sinovac vaccines to private doctors and clinics participating in the programme under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme since March 1. The programme has been running smoothly since its launch. As at today (March 17), more than 1 200 doctors (over 1 300 clinic locations) joining the programme have approached DH to place orders for more than 170 000 doses of vaccine. Around 160 000 doses of vaccines have already been delivered to the doctors' clinics. And about 53 000 persons received their first dose of Sinovac vaccine at private doctors and clinics participating in the programme.

As at today, DH has completed over 1 500 doctors' (involving over 2 100 clinics) enrolment applications and uploaded the list of participating private doctors and clinics that have made vaccine orders to the designated website of the programme (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en/VSS). The DH will continue to process the new applications received and update the list regularly as appropriate. In general, the applications from private doctors and clinics will be processed within three working days after all the required supporting documents are received.

The DH has earlier organised a briefing for participating private doctors on the details of the programme, including that each private doctor will be allocated a certain number of doses of the Sinovac vaccine at the onset. After the doses are nearly finished, the private doctors may make orders according to their needs. The DH will co-ordinate the delivery of the vaccines and monitor the overall vaccine usage, based on the private doctors' usage of the vaccines and vaccine supply.

Members of the public can choose and make an appointment for vaccination direct with a private doctor or clinic under the programme, without going through the Government online booking system. When going for vaccination, one need to bring the identity document and proof for priority group. The public can also read the [fact sheet for CoronaVac](#) and other relevant information on the designated webpage (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en/vaccine).

The DH appeals to members of the public to participate in the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, with a view to safeguarding public health in the community. For details please visit the thematic website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

Statistics for COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme has been implemented for 20 days since February 26.

In the past 24 hours ending at 8pm today (March 17), the following figures were recorded:

(i) About 13 200 persons received their first dose of Sinovac vaccine, including about 9 500 persons vaccinated at eight Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) and about 3 200 persons at private doctors and clinics participating in the programme; and

(ii) About 11 300 persons received their first dose of BioNTech vaccine at 19 CVCs.

(iii) A total of about 24 500 persons received their first dose of vaccine.

The overall percentage of people who have received Sinovac vaccine at eight CVCs today is about 83 per cent, while the overall percentage of people who have received BioNTech vaccine at 19 CVCs today is about 94 per cent.

So far, a cumulative total of about 253 900 persons have received their first vaccination dose (Annex 1), with about 189 600 persons receiving Sinovac vaccine and about 64 300 persons receiving BioNTech vaccine.

As of 8pm today, about 15 000 persons had reserved their first and second doses of the Sinovac vaccine online in the past 24 hours, while about 34 400 persons had reserved their first and second doses of the BioNTech vaccine online.

In the past 24 hours ending at 0000 hours today, there were 16 cases of ambulance transfer to hospital. Among them, 11 cases were discharged and five cases were admitted for observation (Annex 2).