

Government finishes exercise on “restriction-testing declaration” in respect of specified “restricted area” in To Kwa Wan and enforcement operation for breaches of compulsory testing notice

â€‹The Government yesterday (February 6) 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 8pm yesterday, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in To Kwa Wan (i.e. Wah Fat Building, 4-6 Ma Hang Chung Road, To Kwa Wan) were required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing were required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area had undergone testing and the test results were mostly ascertained. Moreover, the Government issued a compulsory testing notice yesterday, requiring persons who had been present at the building for more than two hours from January 24 to February 6, 2021, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, to undergo compulsory testing before February 8. The Government announced the completion of the compulsory testing exercise at around 7am today (February 7) and carried out enforcement actions in the "restricted area" afterwards to verify that all people in the "restricted area" had undergone compulsory testing. The Government announced that the enforcement operation ended at around 9.30am today.

In this exercise, the Home Affairs Department (HAD), the Kowloon City District Office, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Immigration Department, the Highways Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Auxiliary Medical Service mobilised around 300 staff to arrange for implementation of the declaration and enforcement actions for breaches of the compulsory testing notice issued earlier.

The Government provided simple food for persons subject to compulsory testing, including canned food, cup noodles, corn kernels and soy milk, so as to facilitate the dinner arrangements of some persons subject to compulsory testing. One box of masks, bleach and detergent were also provided to persons subject to compulsory testing to help them fight against the virus.

The HAD also set up a hotline for people restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance.

The Government thanks persons subject to compulsory testing for their support and understanding. With everyone's co-operation and efforts, coupled

with the tireless efforts of the testing contractors, residents have been informed about their testing results by SMS notification. After finishing the compulsory testing exercise at around 7am today, the Government took enforcement action in the "restricted area" immediately to verify that all people in the "restricted area" had undergone testing according to the requirements of the declaration and the compulsory testing notice. Persons who could present an SMS notification containing a negative testing result or wore a wristband as proof of having undergone the compulsory testing could leave the "restricted area" through the designated exit after providing personal information to a prescribed officer. The enforcement operation was completed at around 9.30am. Nobody was found not having undergone compulsory testing. Taking into account the above situation, the Secretary for Food and Health revoked the "restriction-testing declaration" in accordance with Cap. 599J (see attachment).

The Government hopes the some 10 households who have not answered the door will contact the Government for arrangement of testing as soon as possible after they read the notices put up by the Government, in the hope of eliminating the possible risk of further spread of the virus in the community.

The Government understands that residents in the district are worried and anxious because of the increase in confirmed cases in recent days. The Government hopes this temporary inconvenience will completely cut the local transmission chains in the district and ease residents' worries and fear, so that they will regain confidence in resuming social and business activities in the area, and return to a normal life.

The Government thanks all participating government staff and the testing agencies for their hard work. The Government is also grateful to those subject to compulsory testing for their support and understanding, and their full co-operation during this period in undergoing testing and waiting for the results at home.

The Government as a whole is united in fighting against the virus despite all the difficulties, and provided testing for all the residents in the district within a short period of time in the hope of achieving zero cases in the district.

The Government will seriously follow up on the compliance situation of the compulsory testing notices and the "restriction-testing declaration" by persons subject to compulsory testing. Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be liable to a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person will 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 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.

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 is closely monitoring the service demand of Accident and Emergency Departments and the occupancy rates in public hospitals. Key service statistics are being issued daily for public information. Details are in the appended table.

SLW's "Letter to Hong Kong" on additional measures to assist financially needy individuals and families (English only)

Following is the "Letter to Hong Kong" by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on additional measures to assist financially needy individuals and families carried on Radio Television Hong Kong Radio 3 this morning (February 7):

Dear Julian (Hutto-Patterson Charitable Foundation Professor of School of Social Welfare of University of California, Berkeley, Professor Julian Chow),

How are you? Long time no see. The infection rate in California has recently dropped by more than 60 per cent from its peak and I wish everything is fine for you and your family during this COVID-19 pandemic. I hope that, with the rolling out of vaccination programmes around the world, the pandemic can be kept under control, and social and economic activities may resume to a certain extent within this year.

With the sustained slackening of Hong Kong's labour market since the second half of 2019, wages and household income came under pressures in tandem, with the impact particularly prominent on low-income households. There are rising public concerns on the livelihood of low-income families under the deteriorating unemployment and underemployment situation.

In light of the tremendous challenges brought about by the epidemic to Hong Kong's employment situation and overall economy, the Hong Kong Special

Administrative Region Government has implemented a host of measures to create and stabilise job opportunities over the past year. The Government expeditiously introduced the Anti-epidemic Fund not only to enhance Hong Kong's overall anti-epidemic capability, but also provide suitable relief to sectors and individuals hard-hit by the epidemic or affected by the anti-epidemic and social distancing measures. Coupled with the Government's injection into the Anti-epidemic Fund and relief measures under the 2020-21 Budget, a financial commitment totalling over HK\$300 billion, which represents about 11 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product, has been incurred.

In view of the continuous fluctuations of the fourth wave of the epidemic which have seriously affected Hong Kong's economy and labour market, the Government has kept on exploring ways to strengthen assistance for the unemployed and their families. In order to provide additional support to individuals and families with financial difficulties, we just announced a few days ago (February 4) the recommendations to implement two sets of new measures under our Working Family Allowance Scheme and the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects.

Firstly, we proposed to substantially relax the working hour requirements of the Working Family Allowance Scheme on a one-year time-limited basis. Specifically, the Government recommends temporarily reducing the basic working hour requirement substantially for non-single-parent households to 72 hours per month in order to allow low-income households to continue to be eligible for applying the Working Family Allowance and receive income support amid a reduction of working hours.

Let me recap some background about the Working Family Allowance Scheme. First introduced as the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme in 2016, the Scheme was rebranded into the Working Family Allowance Scheme in 2018. The Scheme aims to support low-income working households who are not receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and have longer working hours. With the design to encourage full-time employment and reward hard work, there are three tiers of allowance with working hour requirements of 144, 168 and 192 hours per month respectively. The basic working hour requirement is 144 hours per month for non-single-parent households. The Scheme also comes with a Child Allowance for each eligible child in the household.

The Government has implemented a host of improvement measures for the Scheme in the past three years. These included relaxing its eligibility criteria such as extending the Scheme to one-person households, substantially increasing the rates of allowances, and allowing households to aggregate the working hours of household members for a higher level of allowance, etc. As at end-December 2020, the Working Family Allowance Scheme has over 56 000 "active households" involving over 180 000 persons, more than the double of the number of beneficiary households of the former Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme before the implementation of improvement measures in 2018.

The more enhanced Working Family Allowance Scheme has been providing continuous and adequate support for working households in need, with the

annual payout surging by nearly two times from HK\$650 million in 2017-18 to about HK\$1,800 million in 2020-21.

Going back to the newly announced measure, the challenges brought by the protracted COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in worsening situation of unemployment and underemployment. For those who remain employed, they may now have fewer working hours and thus decreasing income. Some may risk dropping out from the Working Family Allowance Scheme due to the fewer working hours. With an aim of preventing such "double jeopardy", the Government recommends temporarily reducing the basic working hour requirement substantially for the non-single-parent households under the Scheme to 72 hours per month. The working hour requirement for the mid-tier allowance will also be reduced from 168 hours per month to 132 hours per month, while the lenient working hour requirements of 36, 54 and 72 hours per month for single-parent households will remain unchanged.

Under this time-limited arrangement, households with aggregated monthly working hours reaching 72 to 131 will be eligible for a maximum of HK\$1,000 Basic Allowance per month, plus a maximum of HK\$1,400 allowance per month for each eligible child. Taking a four-person household with two children as an example, they may receive up to HK\$3,800 per month.

Another newly announced measure is to temporarily relax the asset limits of the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects – let's call it the food bank service for simplicity sake. The service aims to provide one-off basic food assistance for a period of up to eight weeks to help individuals and families encountering sudden change and facing immediate financial hardship in coping with their daily food expenditure. Like any welfare schemes, there is asset limits requirement. Newly unemployed and underemployed individuals and families may not be eligible for the service if their assets exceed the asset limits.

In this regard, it is proposed that the asset limits of this food bank service should be relaxed by pitching to those of the Working Family Allowance Scheme. Again taking a four-person household as an example, the asset limits will be raised from HK\$264,000 to HK\$548,000. We expect additional commitment of about HK\$430 million, which can benefit around 120 000 additional service users.

We hope that the two additional measures will provide some temporary relief on the financial burden of needy individuals and families in Hong Kong.

Well until we meet again, take care and stay healthy.

Yours sincerely,
CK

Government enforces "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in To Kwa Wan

The Government yesterday (February 6) 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 8pm yesterday, by which people within the specified "restricted area" in To Kwa Wan (i.e. Wah Fat Building, 4-6 Ma Hang Chung Road, To Kwa Wan) 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 January 24 to February 6, 2021, to undergo compulsory testing before February 8 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 (February 7) 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 To Kwa Wan who have undergone testing in accordance to the requirements of the relevant declaration and compulsory testing notice, as well as 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 0.00am today. As at 0.00am today, 307 residents had undergone testing. No confirmed cases were found.

Moreover, the Government also assigned staff to visit 135 households, among which 14 households did not answer the door. Those include some households with confirmed cases 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 February 4 to 6, 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 enforces "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Tuen Mun

The Government yesterday (February 6) 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 8.30pm yesterday, by which people within the specified "restricted area" in Tuen Mun (i.e. Tower 9, Hong Kong Gold Coast Phase 2, 1 Castle Peak Road – Castle Peak Bay) 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 building for more than two hours from January 24 to February 6, 2021, to undergo compulsory testing before February 8 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 (February 7) 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 Tuen Mun who have undergone testing in accordance to the requirements of the relevant declaration and compulsory testing notice, as well as 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 175 residents had undergone testing. No confirmed cases were found.

Moreover, the Government also assigned staff to visit 88 households, among which 17 households did not answer the door. Those include some households with confirmed cases 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 February 4 to 6, 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.