

16th round of compulsory testing for staff members of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes to commence shortly

The Government today (May 25) announced that the 16th round 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 will commence shortly.

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 (May 24), 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 the period from June 11 to 24, 2021, or who will provide services to residents or users through hire-of-service contracts with residential care homes and the aforementioned units during that period (including full-time, part-time and relief staff), to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 during the period from May 28 to June 10, 2021, according to the requirements and procedure set out in the notice (the Specified Test). However, persons who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course (i.e. received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine 14 days before the end of the testing period) are not required to undergo the Specified Test. Persons who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course in places outside of Hong Kong (i.e. received the recommended dose(s) of a COVID-19 vaccine as stipulated in relevant guidelines 14 days before the end of the testing period, and the vaccine used is included on the list of vaccines as published on www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/list_of_recognised_covid19_vaccines.pdf) are also not required to undergo the Specified Test.

The staff of the aforementioned institutions may choose the following means to undergo the Specified Test:

- (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 undergo the Specified Test 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) and as instructed by the staff of the laboratory;

(3) To obtain a specimen bottle from one of the 121 post offices, 47 general out-patient clinics of the Hospital Authority or vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations, collect a deep throat saliva sample in the specimen bottle as per the guidelines provided together with the specimen bottle, and return the specimen bottle with the sample (see the specimen bottles distribution and specimen collection locations and times at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);

(4) To undergo the Specified Test at general out-patient clinics of the Hospital Authority as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority; or

(5) 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).

Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice commits an offence and may be subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000. 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 4 (\$25,000) 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 that staff of the said institutions who would undergo testing at community testing centres 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 frame 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 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. Although staff members who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course are exempted from the regular compulsory testing, they can still receive free testing if they voluntarily choose to undergo the test.