

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.