

75th round of compulsory testing for staff members of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes

The Government today (August 5) announced the details of the 75th 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.

In accordance with section 10(1) of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J), the Secretary for Health issued a compulsory testing notice yesterday (August 4), 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 August 17 to August 23, 2022, 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 once during the period from August 10 to August 16, 2022, according to the requirements and procedure set out in the notice (the Specified Test).

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 July 11, 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 may choose to undergo the Specified Test with 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 undergo the Specified Test and provide a sample in accordance with the instructions given by the staff of the laboratory arranged by the Government for the above RCHEs, RCHDs, nursing homes or day service units;

(3) 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

(4) 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).

The samples provided for the tests arranged by the Government for the above RCHEs, RCHDs, nursing homes or day service units must be nasal swabs or combined nasal and throat swabs, while those collected from other means must be combined nasal and throat swabs and must not be taken by the person to be tested.

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 free testing at community testing centres that they should make an advance booking via the community testing centre booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk) as soon as possible. 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 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.