

Anti-epidemic measures concerning foreign domestic helpers

The Government announced today (May 11) that all foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) working in Hong Kong should receive compulsory COVID-19 testing again in the period from May 15 to May 30. The Government announced at the same time that it would not pursue the suggestion of requiring FDHs to receive recognised COVID-19 vaccines when applying for employment visas.

Compulsory testing

A Government spokesman said, "In view of incidents of FDHs confirmed with infection of COVID-19 with the N501Y mutant strain last month, the Government announced on April 30 that all FDHs working in Hong Kong should receive compulsory testing in the period from May 1 to May 9. In this compulsory testing, more than 340 000 FDHs had been tested, with three FDHs found to be infected with the N501Y mutant strain so far, effectively reducing the chance of silent transmission of the mutant strain in the community."

The spokesman continued, "The N501Y mutant strain has high transmissibility with an incubation period that may last longer than 20 days. For prudence's sake, the Food and Health Bureau will issue another compulsory testing notice for FDHs, requiring FDHs to undergo testing from May 15 to May 30. Same as the previous round of compulsory testing, FDHs who have received two doses of vaccine for 14 days are exempted from receiving the test.

"With the experience gained from the earlier compulsory testing, the Government will increase the booking capacity in the new round of testing, and continue to increase the testing capacity at community testing centres and mobile specimen collection stations, especially the testing capacity on Saturdays and Sundays. We appeal to employers to arrange for FDHs to undergo testing at community testing centres on weekdays as far as possible and make bookings in advance, to prevent FDHs from gathering and queuing for testing on Saturdays and Sundays in particular."

The Government has all along implemented anti-epidemic measures based on risk assessment. The FDH population is significant, at about 370 000. Their job mainly involves taking care of family members, including the elderly and children, etc. If an FDH is infected with the virus, the FDH may infect the employer's family members, or it may even result in cross-household infections. To safeguard public health, the Government finds it necessary to require all FDHs to receive compulsory testing again. The spokesman pointed out that compulsory testing arrangements equally applies to persons in other high-risk industries, such as staff of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes, and thanked FDHs and employers for their understanding and co-operation.

Any person who fails to comply with compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person 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.

The Government will strictly follow up on whether relevant persons had complied with the testing notices. The Government reminds exempted FDHs to download their electronic vaccination records or save the printouts of their vaccination records to their mobile phones, or bring along the printouts or copies of their vaccination records, so as to prove eligibility for exemption.

Encourage vaccination

The Government spokesman said, "A suggestion was made earlier that FDHs may be required to receive recognised COVID-19 vaccines when they apply for employment visas. Although this suggestion was based on considerations of safeguarding the community and public health, it aroused numerous opinions and concerns in society. The Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, met with the Consuls General of the Philippines and Indonesia in Hong Kong separately yesterday (May 10) to learn about their views. After consolidating and considering various aspects, the Government decided not to pursue this suggestion."

In view of the threat posed by the mutant strains, it is imperative for people to get vaccinated. While there is still a shortage of COVID-19 vaccines internationally, the two vaccines procured by the Government are sufficient for all Hong Kong people (including FDHs) to get vaccinated. At present, there are still plenty of unutilised quotas every day in the 29 community vaccination centres and over 1 000 private clinics. The Government appeals to all FDHs to receive a vaccination as soon as possible in order to protect their own health and the health of their employers' families and others.

The Government thanks FDHs and employers for their understanding and co-operation with the anti-epidemic measures.