

Government extends the period of operation under the "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice at Ying Kwai House in Kwai Chung Estate

The Government yesterday (January 21) 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 4am today (January 22), under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kwai Chung (i.e. Ying Kwai House, Kwai Chung Estate. See Annex.) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. The Government today decided to extend the period of operation and aims at finishing the exercise at about 7am on January 27. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises and undergo five tests under designated arrangement, until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained, and upon agreement of the Secretary for Food and Health having regard to all the circumstances and public interest of Hong Kong.

The Government spokesman said, "A number of preliminary tested positive cases have been identified at Ying Kwai House of Kwai Chung Estate following the tests this morning. At least eight confirmed cases or preliminary tested positive cases were found since then, which is worrying. In view of the significant risk of infection at Ying Kwai House of Kwai Chung Estate, we consider it necessary to undertake determined action by extending the 'restriction-testing declaration' operation to January 27 to prevent the virus from further spreading."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and requested persons subject to testing to undergo testing as designated between January 22 and January 26. Arrangements have been made for persons subject to testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons. As a mutant strain is involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will

cause inconvenience to the public. We sincerely appeal to the co-operation of residents of Ying Kwai House (including those who are at work and not currently at the premises) to return to their household rather than move out the premises and comply with the testing arrangement. For those who have visited Ying Kwai house in the past two weeks for more than two hours, they should undergo testing on January 23, 24, 25 and 28 in accordance with the compulsory testing notice issued earlier. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially."

In order to maintain public and emergency services within the "restricted area", the Government and relevant working staff (such as healthcare officers and other officers of the Hospital Authority, testing service providers engaged by the Government, and cleaning service providers etc.) are allowed to enter and leave the "restricted area" on condition that personal information and contacts are given, as well as certain infection control instructions are followed (including undergoing testing before leaving the "restricted area" without the need to wait for the test results). In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

The Housing Department has set up hotline (Tel: 2427 9006) which have started operation at 7am today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provides assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the 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 compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Government extends the period of operation under the "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice at Ying Kwai House in Kwai Chung Estate

The Government yesterday (January 21) 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 4am today (January 22), under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kwai Chung (i.e. Ying Kwai House, Kwai Chung Estate. See Annex.) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. The Government today decided to extend the period of operation and aims at finishing the exercise at about 7am on January 27. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises and undergo five tests under designated arrangement, until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained, and upon agreement of the Secretary for Food and Health having regard to all the circumstances and public interest of Hong Kong.

The Government spokesman said, "A number of preliminary tested positive cases have been identified at Ying Kwai House of Kwai Chung Estate following the tests this morning. At least eight confirmed cases or preliminary tested positive cases were found since then, which is worrying. In view of the significant risk of infection at Ying Kwai House of Kwai Chung Estate, we consider it necessary to undertake determined action by extending the 'restriction-testing declaration' operation to January 27 to prevent the virus from further spreading."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and requested persons subject to testing to undergo testing as designated between January 22 and January 26. Arrangements have been made for persons subject to testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons. As a mutant strain is involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will

cause inconvenience to the public. We sincerely appeal to the co-operation of residents of Ying Kwai House (including those who are at work and not currently at the premises) to return to their household rather than move out the premises and comply with the testing arrangement. For those who have visited Ying Kwai house in the past two weeks for more than two hours, they should undergo testing on January 23, 24, 25 and 28 in accordance with the compulsory testing notice issued earlier. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially."

In order to maintain public and emergency services within the "restricted area", the Government and relevant working staff (such as healthcare officers and other officers of the Hospital Authority, testing service providers engaged by the Government, and cleaning service providers etc.) are allowed to enter and leave the "restricted area" on condition that personal information and contacts are given, as well as certain infection control instructions are followed (including undergoing testing before leaving the "restricted area" without the need to wait for the test results). In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

The Housing Department has set up hotlines (Tel: 2751 4421, 2751 4424 and 2751 4428) which will start operation at 7am tomorrow (January 23) for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the 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 compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

EDB announcement in relation to government operations in Kwai Chung Estate

In view of the latest development of the epidemic in Kwai Chung Estate, the Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (January 22) that starting from next Monday (January 24), all schools (including secondary schools, primary schools, kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres) should temporarily arrange for their staff residing in Kwai Chung Estate not to return to schools to work. Schools located at the specified restricted area under restriction-testing declaration in Kwai Chung Estate and its vicinity should also consider arranging for all staff to work from home and suspend all scheduled on-campus activities until schools' Chinese New Year holidays.

If individual schools encounter difficulties in implementing the above arrangements, they may advance the Chinese New Year holidays after obtaining approval from their Incorporated Management Committee/ School Management Committee. The objective is to avoid crowd gatherings on campus. If there are enquiries, please contact the Regional Education Offices or Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres of the EDB.

In line with the above arrangements, staff of private schools offering non-formal curriculum (commonly known as "tutorial schools") should also not return to their schools to work before the specified "restricted area" restriction is lifted.

Schools should remind parents to follow anti-epidemic measures and pay close attention to the health conditions of their children. Students should avoid going to crowded places with poor ventilation. During the period of face-to-face class suspension, schools should continue to maintain communication with parents and students (for instance, schools can make phone calls to students as appropriate) to show care for the learning and emotional needs of the students, and render appropriate assistance to parents.

The EDB will closely monitor the situation and move in step with the development of the overall anti-epidemic measures in Hong Kong. The bureau will continue to review the schooling arrangements and make relevant announcement in a timely manner.

Transcript of remarks of press

conference on anti-epidemic measures (with photo/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference today (January 22). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan; the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui; and the Assistant Director of Housing (Estate Management), Mr Ian Luk. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: So, with tens of thousands of residents required to get tested, how will the authorities reduce the risk of them getting infected while waiting to get tested? And secondly, will the Government consider compensating the residents of the five blocks in Kwai Chung Estate for the five-day lockdown, as some of them may not be able to go to work during this period? And lastly, does the current outbreak at the Kwai Chung Estate show that it's simply quite impossible to prevent the spread of the Omicron variant? Would the Government consider adjusting the current zero-COVID policy? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I will invite Dr Tsui to answer the question on how we could reduce infections while arranging the residents to undergo the tests. On the question of compensation, my response is, in an epidemic of this nature, inevitably businesses and individuals will be affected to varying extents. Some will be more affected, some will be less affected, but inevitably a lot of people will be affected because we have put in so many measures on social distancing, on restricting people's movement, on compelling people to take tests and so on. I hope that we are acting in concert to tackle this COVID-19 epidemic. At the moment, it is not a question of compensation. It is a question of getting out of the COVID-19 epidemic, especially relating to the Omicron variant, as soon as possible. And of course, apart from this sort of lockdown of people, we have been putting a lot of people in quarantine for a much longer period, so they will be out of a job for a much longer period. But they are making the sacrifice in order to contribute to the anti-epidemic efforts of Hong Kong, and I'm extremely grateful to all those people who have been adversely affected as a result of these measures.

Now, people have been asking about this COVID-zero policy. I have said it many times – it is not absolute zero. In Chinese it's "å<•æ...<æ,...é>¶" ("dynamic zero infection"). It's a form of trying to tackle whenever there is a case. And this has also been the Mainland's strategy. They have been having sporadic outbreaks in various cities, especially in recent days. The important thing is, under our strategy, we strengthen our capacity to tackle these episodic outbreaks in order to suppress the spread of the variant as soon as possible so that there will not be a massive community outbreak in Hong Kong. We are not, sort of, aiming to absolutely attain zero as a strategy. But the alternative to this type of strategy will be the so-called "living with the virus" – in other words, we open our borders, we have no social distancing measures, we will, like one country, announce that you

don't even have to wear your mask. In my view, Hong Kong does not possess the prerequisites to go for that approach. One is because we still want to open the border, not only with the Mainland but also with the rest of the world; and secondly, our vaccination rate is not yet ideal. The Mainland has attained over 90 per cent. Singapore has attained over 90 per cent. We are still, as far as the first dose is concerned, at 77.5 per cent. Especially when the rate is very low amongst the elderly, and if the elderly get infected, the consequences are very, very serious. I want to add that although many people said that Omicron is not very serious – most of the cases are stable, which is Hong Kong's situation today – Omicron does cause fatalities in other parts of the world. So, we have to be extremely careful, especially those unvaccinated people.

At the moment, we will continue to adopt the strategy that has taken Hong Kong through the last two years. But, in the course of implementing the strategy and individual measures, I and my team will continuously review and improve them and try to make life slightly less difficult for the people of Hong Kong.

Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health: Regarding the infection control requirement of this testing, indeed restriction-testing declaration is not a new measure and we have conducted it in last one or more years. The venue organisers and testing operators have already had a good arrangement and an infection control protocol to follow on. There are several things we need to focus in reducing the risk of infection transmission during the operations. One is to avoid overcrowding and to have an orderly arrangement to test. Second is to conduct the testing in open areas with good ventilation. Third is the individual practice of the swabbers during the operations and they have to wear sufficient PPE (personal protective equipment) with a good practice of infection control. Last but not the least is the hand hygiene and the (wearing of) mask of individual citizens who have undergone testing. During and after the test, citizens should be aware of hand hygiene and use steriliser to disinfect their hands after the test.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)



Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Kwai Chung (2)

The Government today (January 22) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 10.30pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kwai Chung (i.e. Chin Kwai House, Kwai Chung Estate. See Annex) 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 "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about 12noon tomorrow (January 23).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. A number of cases tested preliminarily positive/positive have been detected at Kwai Chung Estate in recent days, including cases tested preliminarily positive who have lived in the abovementioned building, and the preliminary test results involved mutant strain. The risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and requested persons subject to testing to undergo testing before 2.30am tomorrow. Arrangements have been made for persons subject to testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around 12noon tomorrow. The Government will make public announcement when the declaration expire officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

Persons in the "restricted area" who have undergone testing today, and are able to provide the SMS notification through a mobile phone or related certification containing the test results, are not required to take the test again. However, they 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. Also, according to the compulsory testing notice to be issued today, any person who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from January 13, 2022 to January 22, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before January 24, 2022. As mutant strain is involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have been tested in recent days are also required to undergo testing.

In addition, in accordance with the latest arrangement, persons who resided in the same building as the case tested preliminarily positive/positive carrying variant of concern suspected to be Omicron are required to undergo compulsory testing on days 2, 3, 4, 7, 12 and 19 counting from the day subsequent to that when the relevant confirmed case last stayed in that building before being admitted to hospital for treatment or leaving Hong Kong.

The Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2835 1473) which starts operation at 10.30pm today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the 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 compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.