

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Causeway Bay

The Government today (January 5) 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 7.30pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Causeway Bay (i.e. Serene Court, 41 Tin Hau Temple Road, Causeway Bay. 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 6.30am tomorrow (January 6).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As a preliminary tested positive case who has lived in the abovementioned building was detected today, and the preliminary test result involved a mutant strain, the risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area after the test result was found to be positive."

The Government will arrange dedicated staff to collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 12am tomorrow. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk.

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 6.30am tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires 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 from January 3, 2022 to January 5, 2022, 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 December 16, 2021 to January 5, 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 7, 2022. As a mutant strain is involved, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons are also required to undergo testing.

In addition, in accordance with the latest arrangement, persons who resided in the same building as the preliminary tested positive case 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 7.30pm 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.

Government makes "restriction-testing

declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Kowloon Tong

The Government today (January 5) 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 7pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kowloon Tong (i.e. Rock View Gardens, 36 Tat Chee Avenue, Yau Yat Tsuen, Kowloon Tong. 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 7am tomorrow (January 6).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As a preliminary tested positive case who has lived in the abovementioned building was detected today, and the preliminary test result involved a mutant strain, the risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area after the test result was found to be positive."

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 12am tomorrow. Arrangements will be made for persons subject to compulsory 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 compulsory 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 7am tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires 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."

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Special arrangements for SWD and its subsidised service units in view of epidemic situation

In light of the latest developments of the epidemic situation, the Government has announced that social distancing measures will be tightened from January 7 to 20.

A spokesperson for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (January 5) that the services provided by the SWD and its subsidised service units will be maintained in the aforementioned period. However, various kinds of group activities, including interest classes and talks, and mass programmes in all service units will be suspended in the period. Service units may consider conducting activities online.

In addition, except for visits for official or compassionate reasons, all visiting arrangements for residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities will be suspended in the period.

For enquiries, members of the public may call the SWD's hotline at 2343 2255 or contact the related service units.

All service units will also strengthen infection control measures. Staff are reminded to follow necessary infection control measures. All visitors must put on masks, have their body temperature checked and maintain social distancing.

Working Group on air change or air purifiers in catering premises holds meeting in view of latest epidemic developments

The Secretary for Food and Health stipulated in March last year a requirement on air change or air purifiers to be complied with in dine-in catering premises in the directions in relation to the catering business under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (the Regulation). The Working Group established for the smooth implementation of the requirement held a meeting yesterday evening (January 4) at which the Chairman, expert members

and representatives from government departments offered views on anti-epidemic strategies in response to the latest epidemic developments.

The Chairman of the Working Group, Professor Yuen Pak-leung, said, "The Working Group notes that over the past two weeks, multiple confirmed cases have visited a number of restaurants during their respective incubation or infectious period, among which a cluster was found in one of the restaurants. The Working Group is highly concerned about the incident and has examined during the meeting the relevant information such as the implementation of air change and air purifiers at the restaurant concerned, the seating distribution of the confirmed cases and the duration of their stay."

The Omicron variant is the mutant variant with the most mutations since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and may carry higher transmissibility. It is also spreading extremely fast globally. The number of confirmed cases of Omicron has been increasing rapidly around the world as well as becoming the mainstream mutant strain in some countries and places. In view of the tradition for families and friends to dine together during the Lunar New Year, the risk of virus transmission may further increase as people will take their masks off when having a meal at catering premises. At the meeting, the Working Group put forward some observations and advice after discussion of some facts known at this stage. The Working Group would like to take this opportunity to remind licensees/operators of premises, various sectors and members of the public to remain vigilant in adopting epidemic control measures. Operators of dine-in catering premises need to ensure that the air change per hour (ACH) is sufficient in their premises, and the fresh air supply is evenly distributed in the seating areas and individual compartments.

Professor Yuen said, "Indoor environment with sufficient and balanced air change or equipped appropriately with air purifiers of good and high efficacy performance can help reduce the risk of virus transmission. 'A Guide on Compliance with the Requirement on Air Change/Air Purifiers in Seating Areas of Dine-in Catering Premises' (the Guide), issued by the Working Group last year, stated that registered specialist contractor (ventilation works category) (ventilation contractors) can adopt improvement measures to increase the ACH in the seating areas and individual compartments at dine-in catering premises. Operators of catering premises can seek advice from their ventilation contractors regarding balanced fresh air supply."

It is also mentioned in the Guide that ventilation contractors are required to calculate the number of air purifiers required in the premises and determine the position of air purifiers in the seating areas and individual partitioned zones, having regard to the on-the-ground situation and the manufacturer manual, to achieve the best expected effect of the air purifiers. Operators of catering premises are required to place the air purifiers in suitable places according to the manufacturer manual and the recommendations of the ventilation contractors, and ensure proper operation, maintenance and repair of the air purifiers, so as to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has all along been

inspecting licensed catering premises and taking appropriate follow-up actions. Apart from issuing advisory letters to operators of catering premises, the FEHD also reminded them again during inspections that, pursuant to the directions under the Regulation, they must properly switch on, operate, maintain and repair the air purifiers in accordance with the manufacturer manual when the premises is open for business.

Professor Yuen continued, "Currently, the Guide formulated by the Working Group has played certain roles in reducing the risk of virus transmission. In view that the mutant strains mutate quickly, the Working Group will continue to closely monitor the epidemic developments in Hong Kong and other places, and will provide suggestions on the updates of the Guide when necessary, taking into consideration the epidemic developments, new scientific information, new directions under the Regulation, data on the implementation of the Guide, as well as views of the relevant sectors, etc."

The Working Group expressed the hope that the catering sector, other sectors and members of the public would continue to comply with the relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease in a concerted and persistent manner to protect personal and public health. In addition, as vaccination is a very crucial part of the local anti-epidemic strategy, the Working Group also encouraged the public to proactively respond to the appeal to receive vaccination as early as possible.

Enforcement actions against illegal hillside burial cases

The Home Affairs Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Lands Department (LandsD) today (January 5) launched enforcement action in the Permitted Burial Grounds (PBGs) of Sam Mun Tsai (TP/E7) and Tong Kai Tseng (TP/E13) in Tai Po against illegal hillside burial. It is anticipated that 28 illegal graves/urn houses/urns will be removed in about three days and the human remains in them will be reburied at Sandy Ridge Cemetery.

The FEHD and the LandsD posted notices on 32 unauthorised graves/urn houses/urns located within the PBGs of Sam Mun Tsai and Tong Kai Tseng on September 23 last year, and required the related persons of the graves/urn houses/urns concerned to cease occupation of the government land and to contact relevant government departments before October 24 last year, or else the human remains inside the graves/urn houses/urns concerned would be reburied at Sandy Ridge Cemetery. At the expiration of the period, 28 graves/urn houses/urns remained unclaimed. The Government thus commenced the clearance operation today.

The Government has been implementing a pilot scheme on the management of

PBGs in individual PBGs since 2016. Taking into account the actual circumstances of each PBG, the Government has been implementing appropriate improvement measures, including erecting boundary pillars for the PBGs, conducting record surveys of existing graves and urns, imposing restrictions on the size of burial sites and demarcating available spaces in PBGs for new applications of burial sites, in order to ensure that the places of burials are within PBGs. The pilot scheme has now been extended to 15 PBGs, covering nine administrative districts in the New Territories.

The Government has examined the data obtained from the pilot scheme earlier and decided to commence follow-up actions against illegal burials in the PBGs in phases. The operation this time is the second operation subsequent to the first enforcement operation conducted in the PBG of Tai Tau Chau (SK/52) in Sai Kung in July last year. The Government will continue its follow-up actions, including planning to post notices on other unauthorised graves/urn houses/urns before Ching Ming Festival.

A Government spokesman reiterated that, according to the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28), it is an offence when any person occupying government land, otherwise than under permission from the Authority, does not cease the occupation as required by a notice prescribed by the Ordinance. Any property or structure on the occupied government land may be demolished and removed by the Government, and the occupier may be prosecuted. Furthermore, according to the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), it is an offence to bury human remains without permission in writing of the Authority. Offenders are liable to prosecution, and the human remains inside the graves concerned will be removed.