

Compulsory testing notice gazetted

The Government today (November 22) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) for the first time and published in the gazette a compulsory testing notice, which requires any person who had been present at 14 specified dance premises (see Annex) during the period from November 1 to 21 to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test by November 24.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The local epidemic situation is worsening rapidly. The number of confirmed cases of a cluster related to dancing activities and dancing venues continued to increase significantly in the past few days, with cases distributed all over the territory and some confirmed cases are asymptomatic. It indicates the existence of many silent transmission chains in the community. The Government must act swiftly. To cut the transmission chains as quickly as possible, the Centre for Health Protection has been tracing possibly infected persons who had been to the relevant dancing venues. Meanwhile, it is necessary for the Government to issue a compulsory testing notice targeting specified dance premises under Cap. 599J immediately, in order to require the relevant persons to get tested promptly to avoid delay in treatment."

According to the notice, all persons who had been to any of the 14 specified dance premises during the period from November 1 to 21, must undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test by November 24 through designated means. Persons who are subject to compulsory testing may choose to undergo testing as below:

(1) To attend any of the four Community Testing Centres (see the list at <https://www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/>) by November 24. The relevant testing charges can be waived;

(2) To collect a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 47 designated general outpatient clinics of the Hospital Authority (see the list at https://www.ha.org.hk/haho/ho/covid-19/GOPC_extend_EN.pdf) and return the specimen to designated specimen collection points by November 24;

(3) To undergo testing at any healthcare facilities of the Hospital Authority (including general outpatient clinics and accident and emergency departments) as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority by November 24; or

(4) To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories recognised by the Department of Health (see the list at https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories.pdf).

Persons who are subject to compulsory testing must also report the result of the test or submit the test report to the Government by phone (6275 6901), fax (2530 5872) or email (ct@csb.gov.hk) by November 27.

The spokesman said, "To reduce transmission risk, persons who underwent testing are advised to stay at home and avoid going out when waiting for test results."

Any enquiries on compulsory testing arrangements may be addressed to the hotline at 6275 6901 (to commence operation today, operating daily from 9am to 6pm). The Government will continue to trace possibly infected persons who had been to the relevant dancing venues, and seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notice. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$2,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified timeframe. 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 spokesman said, "The 14 specified dance premises adopted the mode of operation of party rooms. In accordance with the directions and specifications by the Secretary for Food and Health under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) on November 20, these premises must be closed from November 22 for a period of five days till November 26. Furthermore, within this period, live performance and dancing must not be allowed in any catering premises (including bars or pubs) as well as clubs or nightclubs."

"Strengthening COVID-19 testing is an integral part of the epidemic control strategy, which can help to slow down the transmission of the virus by early identification, early isolation and early treatment. The Government will later require other high risk groups or high exposure groups to undergo compulsory testing, including symptomatic persons, staff of residential care homes for the elderly and taxi drivers, etc. The relevant policy bureaux are actively working on the implementation of the relevant compulsory testing and will announce the details later."

"Understanding that some members of the public are concerned about their livelihood if they are tested positive, the Government will provide a one-off grant of \$5,000 to local citizens who have been confirmed COVID-19 positive. Details will be announced by the Labour and Welfare Bureau later."

"The Government urges all individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, or individuals with infection risks (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases) to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons. The Food and Health Bureau will publish compulsory testing notices regarding particular groups when necessary taking into account the epidemic development and the testing participation rate."