

Conditional free COVID-19 testing service continues to be provided for targeted groups at community testing centres

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) announced today (August 31) that in the face of the threat posed by mutant strains and as a preparation for the fifth wave of epidemic, the Government will continue to require staff of targeted groups to receive vaccination as soon as possible, while at the same time strengthen the testing arrangements for staff who have yet to complete a vaccination course. In view of the protection provided by the vaccination, fully vaccinated staff are no longer required to undergo regular or such frequent testing in general. Only in very exceptional situations can an individual staff member postpone his or her vaccination, e.g. if he or she is unfit to receive vaccination at the moment because of health reasons, but the staff will be subject to undergo more frequent testing, which must be done by using combined nasal and throat swabs.

Free COVID-19 testing at community testing centres (CTCs) is provided only to individual eligible persons of targeted groups (mainly those who have yet to complete a COVID-19 vaccination course or are unfit for vaccination because of health reasons), and relevant persons must present valid medical certificates/vaccination records/documents of identity proof (note) for receiving free tests. This requirement will be applicable to all targeted groups (including staff of catering businesses) starting from September. In other words, persons of targeted groups who are not unfit for vaccination because of health reasons will need to pay for the regular testing service. Eligible persons shall make bookings online (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en) for free testing service at the CTCs. Those who have no appointment or not meeting the eligibility/conditions need to pay for the testing service at \$240. The free testing arrangement will be available until end of September.

Persons eligible for booking a free test every three days

- Staff of quarantine hotels and specified hotels (fully vaccinated persons: every seven days)
- Staff of designated transport to designated quarantine hotels (fully vaccinated persons: every seven days)

Persons eligible for booking a free test every seven days

- Staff of catering businesses and bars/pubs
- Staff of re-opened scheduled premises
- Airport staff (fully vaccinated airport staff not under “targeted groups”: every 14 days)
- Practitioners working at Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH)

Persons eligible for booking a free test every 14 days

- Staff of designated scheduled premises and public and private swimming pools/beaches (staff of individual premises operating under certain modes or capacities: every seven days)
- Construction site personnel
- School staff

Other persons eligible for booking a free test

- Working staff accompanying and receiving local group tours

(To undergo one test within seven days before the tour, and no more than one free test every seven days)

The specific requirements for various targeted groups (including testing frequency, specimen requirement, conditions for receiving free test) are set out in the Annex.

A spokesman for the FHB said, "The Government started to provide one-off free COVID-19 testing to targeted groups at the CTCs through online booking last year. The response has been positive. In the light of continuous detection of multiple cases involving the L452R mutant strain in Hong Kong recently, and taking into account the high transmissibility of mutant strains, we consider it necessary to extend the relevant testing arrangements and cover school staff, such that we can take effective measures against the cases immediately to cut off transmission chains as quickly as possible."

The Government regularly reviews whether relevant targeted groups should undergo regular testing and if such testing should be publicly funded based on the latest epidemic risk assessment. In accordance with the latest anti-epidemic measures announced by the Education Bureau and the Airport Authority Hong Kong, eligible school staff and targeted groups of the Hong Kong International Airport can undergo free testing every 14 or seven days at the CTCs respectively. Moreover, certain groups need to undergo more frequent testing: from August 26, the testing requirement for staff of Type B catering businesses has been tightened and those staff who are not fully vaccinated are now required to undergo testing every seven days. Practitioners working at SSSH and staff members of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes who are fully vaccinated can also receive a free test every seven days on a voluntary basis to safeguard their health and that of their families and co-workers.

"Since the implementation of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme in late February, there was ample time for persons of targeted groups to receive vaccination. The provision of free tests for targeted groups involves the use of public resources. Given that the Government must uphold the principle of effective use of resources, public money should only be used to subsidise individual eligible persons on the nucleic acid tests in very exceptional

situations," said the spokesman.

The spokesman reiterated that the two vaccines currently recognised in Hong Kong are safe and effective, giving protection to the vaccinated persons and those around them. The vaccines have been received by billions of people worldwide and getting vaccination is the best way to fight the virus. Except for those with contraindications, most people are fit for vaccination. Currently, all Hong Kong residents aged 12 or above are eligible for receiving free vaccination. The Government calls on the public to treasure the vaccine supply in Hong Kong and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Note: (i) Persons who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of health reasons are required to present a relevant medical certificate; (ii) persons who have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine or those who have received the second dose but not yet passed 14 days should present relevant vaccination record (such as by downloading their electronic vaccination records or saving the printouts of their vaccination records to their mobile phones, or bringing along the printouts or copies of their vaccination records); and (iii) certain groups should also present card/letter/document proof issued by relevant organisations for verification of identity.