

COVID-19 vaccination in lieu of regular testing arrangement for government employees to be further tightened

The Government announced today (December 21) that the current vaccination in lieu of regular testing arrangement for government employees will be further tightened from December 28, and a "vaccine bubble" arrangement at government buildings and offices will be implemented in mid-February 2022 under which government employees entering the above mentioned premises for work-related purposes will be required to present proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

"In view of increasing threat posed to Hong Kong amid the growing number of infection cases involving mutant strains of COVID-19 with high transmissibility in the world, it is necessary for the Government to press for early COVID-19 vaccination among its employees so as to ensure that government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) have a strong defense," a Government spokesman said.

Under the tightened arrangement, the testing requirements for government employees who have not received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine will be tightened from once a week to once every three days. Starting from December 28, their test results will be valid for three days only. Same as the current arrangements, the specimens collected from them must be through combined nasal and throat swabs.

For government employees who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination due to medical conditions supported by a valid medical certificate, relevant B/Ds will continue to allow these employees as far as possible undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 tests at community testing centres on a three-day cycle provided that departmental operations are not affected. B/Ds will continue to fund their tests on a reimbursement basis. Other government employees who have not received their first dose of a vaccine should take the tests once every three days outside working hours and pay for these tests at their own expense.

In other words, starting from January 3, 2022, all government employees who have not received their first dose of a vaccine will be subject to testing once every three days. The Civil Service Bureau has issued guidelines on the tightening arrangements to Heads of Departments and the departments will announce to their staff members on the relevant arrangements.

Meanwhile, the Government will implement a "vaccine bubble" arrangement at government buildings and offices from mid-February 2022. By that time, save for those who are unfit for vaccination due to medical conditions

supported by a valid medical certificate, all government employees will be required to present their vaccination record when they enter government buildings and offices for work-related purposes. B/Ds will issue a special pass to those who are unfit for vaccination due to medical conditions supported by a valid medical certificate for entering government buildings and offices.

Upon implementation of the "vaccine bubble" arrangement, the requirement of using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application when entering government buildings or offices will continue. Except for exempted persons, all government employees and members of the public are still required to use the app to scan the venue QR code before they are allowed to enter government buildings or offices.

"Since the launch of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the Government has reiterated on many occasions that the civil service plays an important role in the anti-epidemic effort and the provision of public services, as such government employees have an obligation to get vaccinated. Those who refuse to receive vaccination without duly certified medical reasons are acting irresponsibly, as it will increase the risk of infection in their offices. If there is a confirmed case, not only will public services be affected due to temporary closure of the office, the health of their fellow colleagues and the people being served will also be put at risk. As such, the Government has decided to implement a 'vaccine bubble' arrangement at government buildings and offices to fortify the protective barrier, reduce the risk of the spread of mutant strains, and safeguard the health of government employees and members of the public," the spokesman said.

"With the implementation of the 'vaccine bubble' arrangement, the Government will be in a better position to relax the regular testing arrangements for government employees whose health conditions do not allow them to receive vaccination. We are now working out the implementation details, including the launch date and exemption arrangements, and will announce the details to our staff in due course."

Currently, around 96 per cent of government employees have already taken the first dose of vaccine. The Government strongly appeals to unvaccinated government employees to get vaccinated as early as possible and will continue the current measures to enable government employees to receive vaccination, including allowing staff to receive vaccination during duty hours and favourably handling applications for sick leave or vacation leave when staff experience side effects arising from vaccination.