

CSD further suspends social visits to persons in custody in light of epidemic development

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) said today (February 25) that in view of the situation in correctional institutions and the deteriorating epidemic development in the community, the CSD has further suspended social visits to persons in custody (PICs) until March 6.

To detect and terminate infection cases and silent transmission chains in correctional institutions, the CSD has implemented the "lock-up routine" since February 18 and carried out a comprehensive COVID-19 testing in the institutions. In the past few days, multiple silent transmission chains and cases of infection have been successfully detected in various correctional institutions through deep throat saliva specimen tests and rapid antigen tests. As of February 24, a total of 202 confirmed cases of PICs and 135 cases of PICs who tested preliminarily positive through rapid tests, mainly at Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre and Stanley Prison, have been identified. All the PICs concerned are being isolated for observation.

According to medical advice, the first phase of the comprehensive COVID-19 testing has effectively prevented the epidemic from rapidly spreading inside correctional institutions. However, it is anticipated that more cases of infection will be found in the coming week and it is necessary to continue the COVID-19 testing for PICs and reduce the flow of people and contact in correctional institutions. Furthermore, the number of infection cases in the community has been increasing recently and the situation remains severe. Confirmed cases and transmission groups among visit room staff of different correctional institutions have also been found. In view of the situation of correctional institutions and the rapidly deteriorating epidemic development in the community, it is necessary for the CSD to continue with the emergency measure by further suspending social visits to PICs until March 6. The CSD will review the arrangement in due course. Please pay attention to the announcement by the CSD and the departmental website for details. While knowing that the relevant arrangement will cause inconvenience to PICs and their relatives, the CSD hopes that members of the public will understand and join hands to combat the epidemic and protect the safety of various stakeholders.

The CSD encourages PICs to maintain communication with outsiders through letters during this period. As such, special approval will be granted to increase the number of letters sent by PICs at public expense from one to three during the period from February 28 to March 6. Moreover, every PIC will be allowed to additionally receive approved hand-in articles once in this period. For the types and maximum quantities of the approved hand-in articles, please refer to the CSD website.