

CSD latest arrangements in light of epidemic development

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) said today (March 18) that it has adopted a series of emergency measures over the past few weeks to curb the rapid spread of COVID-19 inside correctional institutions. By conducting rapid antigen tests daily, reducing the flow of people and contacts in correctional institutions, as well as arranging for persons in custody (PICs) who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contact groups to go to isolation centres and "square dormitory" facilities for observation and treatment, the CSD has preliminarily stopped the outbreak of the epidemic in correctional institutions exponentially. The number of confirmed cases detected has dropped from a daily average of over 140 persons during the peak period (February 28 to March 6) to a daily average of about 75 persons this week, mainly from the close contact groups. Currently, about 850 PICs who tested positive for COVID-19 are undergoing isolation and treatment, and a cumulative total of about 1 630 PICs have recovered. Among these cases, only two PICs were sent to public hospitals for treatment due to other illnesses, while the rest had mild symptoms and were not required to be treated at public hospitals.

In respect of staff, the number of staff members absent from work as a result of testing positive for COVID-19, or close contacts, also dropped from a daily average of about 1 000 persons at the peak period (February 28 to March 6) to a daily average of about 500 persons this week.

Although the epidemic situation has gradually stabilised in correctional institutions, it is impossible for the CSD to fully resume all social visits at the present time in view of the persistent high number of infection cases in the community and the risk of a quick rebound of the epidemic situation in correctional institutions. To strike a balance between infection control and rehabilitation needs of PICs, the CSD has decided to resume social visit arrangements on a limited basis from March 24 to April 24. To control the flow of people and reduce the risk of infection, the following new measures will be taken: (i) remand PICs are allowed to receive two social visits only during the period and only one visitor is allowed during each visit; (ii) convicted PICs are allowed to receive one social visit only during the period and only one visitor is allowed during each visit; (iii) visitors are required to conduct rapid antigen test by themselves with negative result on the day of the visit, and declare the test result in a "health declaration form" upon arriving at the correctional institutions; and (iv) save for exempted persons, visitors are required to present a vaccination record of at least the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app to register before being allowed to enter the correctional institutions for visits. The above visit arrangements may be subject to change according to the epidemic developments in correctional institutions, and visitors should pay attention to announcements by the CSD and the departmental website.

Visitors should also note that all PICs testing positive for COVID-19 and their close contact groups are not allowed to receive visits as they are subject to isolation for treatment and observation. Registered users of the HKCSD Mobile App may use the app to enquire about whether individual PICs are allowed to receive visits. Visitors may also call the staff of the Rehabilitation Unit or visit room of respective correctional institutions (please refer to the departmental website for the telephone numbers), or the CSD hotline 2511 3511 in advance to enquire about the visit status of individual PICs. If PICs are not allowed to receive visits as a result of testing positive for COVID-19, or belonging to close contact groups during the said period, they will be allowed to receive approved hand-in articles on one occasion. For the types and maximum quantities of the approved hand-in articles, please refer to the CSD website.

Moreover, official visit service will be resumed on a limited basis from March 24 to April 24, during which visitors are required to make a reservation through the "Official Visit e-booking Service" and receive a confirmation of the application. Visitors should also follow arrangements (iii) and (iv) as mentioned above in order to enter the correctional institutions for visits.