

CSD latest arrangements in light of epidemic development

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) said today (March 3) that during the COVID-19 testing in the past two weeks, about 1,000 persons in custody (PICs) were found to be infected with COVID-19 as at yesterday (March 2), with the majority being asymptomatic cases. They were mainly detained at reception centres for newly admitted PICs including Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre, Stanley Prison, Lo Wu Correctional Institution and Pik Uk Correctional Institution. The CSD has promptly isolated and provided treatment to the infected PICs and close contact groups, and successively converted Cape Collinson Correctional Institution and Sha Tsui Correctional Institution into isolation centres. To further enhance the capacity of isolation facilities, the CSD is proceeding to convert a half-way house, namely Phoenix House, into the third isolation facility, which is expected to commence operation tomorrow (March 4). The department will continue to conduct COVID-19 testing for PICs, reduce the flow of people and contacts in correctional institutions as well as to isolate infected persons.

In respect of staff, as at yesterday, about 1,000 staff members were absent from work as a result of being infected with COVID-19 as well as being required to work from home as they are close contacts (including those affected by confirmed cases of family members). The daily operations of all the correctional institutions have been seriously affected. In the past few weeks, the CSD has taken various emergency measures to mobilise all the available manpower resources, including staff of the Staff Training Institute, Rehabilitation Unit and the Headquarters, etc, to work on the front line. The CSD has also changed the mode of operation and duty pattern of correctional institutions, and arranged for frontline staff to form a special group, "Dirty Team", to manage the isolation facilities with high infection risks.

In view of the rapidly deteriorating epidemic situation in the community and the custodial environment of the correctional institutions, the number of infection cases of staff and PICs is anticipated to remain high in the coming weeks. It is necessary for the CSD to continue with the emergency measures by centralising all the manpower resources to maintain the basic operation of correctional institutions. As such, the CSD will suspend all visits, including social visits and official visits, in the coming two weeks (March 7 to 20), and deploy all resources of visit rooms to support the custodial duty of frontline staff in correctional institutions. While knowing that this arrangement will cause inconvenience to various stakeholders, the CSD hopes all sectors of the community will understand the current development and co-operate accordingly.

Given the above arrangement, special approval will be granted again to increase the number of letters sent by PICs at public expense from one to three per week during the period from March 7 to 20. The existing arrangement

of allowing every PIC to receive approved hand-in articles once between February 28 and March 6 will be extended to March 20. For the types and maximum quantities of the approved hand-in articles, please refer to the CSD website.