

DH explains arrangement of transferring close contacts to quarantine centres for quarantine

In response to media enquiries about the transfer of COVID-19 close contacts to quarantine centres, Department of Health (DH) spokesman stressed today (December 18) that DH had been striving to make arrangement for transfer of asymptomatic close contacts to quarantine centres for mandatory quarantine as soon as possible in order to minimize the spread of virus. DH is all alone closely monitoring the development of epidemic situation and timely reviewing the manpower requirements to ensure smooth operation.

The spokesman said, to enhance operational efficiency in transferring close contacts to quarantine centres, DH had immediately deployed additional staff and enhanced the ancillary facilities to cope with the sudden increase in workload.

In normal circumstances, DH daily arranges up to 200 close contacts to quarantine centres. Since the fourth wave of COVID-19 outbreak in late November, DH has made internal deployment to strengthen manpower and increased the transfer capacity to 250 to 300 daily. In the past week, the capacity has reached over 400 on certain days.

The spokesman pointed out that since late November, the increased number of confirmed cases involved patients in various districts in Hong Kong, large clusters and a significant number of close contacts. The number of confirmed case remains at a high level in early December with an exponential increase in the number of close contacts and an upsurge in workload.

Apart from the daily handling of close contacts of new confirmed cases, DH also needed to handle large-scale evacuations of residents from five residential buildings in the last two weeks. Most of the staff who were responsible for transferring close contacts to quarantine centres were mobilised to provide on-site support in the evacuation exercises. As a result, some close contacts could not be promptly transferred to quarantine centres. DH staff have made their best endeavor to make arrangement as soon as possible.

Upon receiving the information of close contacts, DH will arrange designated vehicles to transfer them to quarantine centres as soon as possible. It requires inter-departmental collaboration, including DH staff to liaise with close contacts and inform Civil Aid Service and other on-site staff of quarantine centres, Government Logistics Department to arrange designated vehicles and the Auxiliary Medical Service to escort close contacts.

DH staff are required to call the close contacts to verify their

information on the quarantine orders and to check their physical conditions to ensure that they are asymptomatic as well as to record their special needs (such as medical needs, food allergy, pets at home, room arrangements). Close contacts will be informed of the pick-up arrangement and the facilities in quarantine centre. They are also allowed time to pack their belongings for the admission to quarantine centre. The process involves substantial liaison and coordination.

DH will continue to work in collaboration with government departments and parties concerned to ensure smooth operation.