

EDB to arrange COVID-19 testing for all teachers and staff in kindergartens and primary, secondary and special schools

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (November 3) announced that starting from next Monday (November 9), the COVID-19 Targeted Group Testing Scheme (TGTS) for staff of boarding sections of special schools will be stepped up. More comprehensive surveillance will also be put in place to arrange free-of-charge testing for all teachers and staff in kindergartens (including kindergarten-cum-child care centres) and primary, secondary and special schools in batches with a view to safeguarding the health of school staff and students.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "Testing is an integral part of the strategy in preventing and fighting the virus. To step up virus testing to achieve the objective of 'early identification, early isolation and early treatment', the Government has continued to implement the TGTS, including arranging free testing for individual high-risk groups such as staff of boarding sections of special schools in July this year. In addition, the Government launched the Universal Community Testing Programme in September, in which the EDB arranged some schools as testing centres and also encouraged school staff, students and parents to participate actively in the testing to safeguard the health of all school staff and students."

The spokesman said, "Given the volatile development of the epidemic and the need to cope with the fourth wave of the epidemic which might emerge this autumn and winter with greater severity, we must remain vigilant. In line with the Government's epidemic prevention and infection control measures, the EDB will step up the TGTS for special schools by arranging regular testing for all staff of boarding sections of special schools once every three weeks."

The spokesman added, "Taking into consideration that schools are places where people gather and school staff are high-exposure groups, as a precautionary measure, the EDB will extend the TGTS to conduct extensive and continuous surveillance at the level of teachers and staff of kindergartens (including kindergarten-cum-child care centres) and primary and secondary schools during autumn and winter. This will not only help detect confirmed cases and cut the transmission chains in the community, but also provide data for reference for the overall assessment of the epidemic situation."

ã€ã€ã€ã€

The spokesman said testing would be conducted on a voluntary basis. Taking schools as a unit, the EDB will sample about 2 per cent of teaching and non-teaching staff in Hong Kong for a deep throat saliva (DTS) test on each school day. The number of schools sampled may be adjusted

according to the data obtained with a view to conducting testing for all 130 000 school staff in Hong Kong.

The school staff and staff of boarding sections of special schools joining the TGTS should register relevant information at the government website (www.tgptest.gov.hk) and collect the DTS specimens by themselves. They should return the specimen bottles to schools on the specified dates for the testing contractor to conduct the testing. The specimen bottles will not indicate any personal information and hence the testing contractor will not collect any personal information. The staff concerned will be informed of the testing results by short messaging service. For those cases that test positive, they will be referred to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health for follow-up action.

The spokesman said, "As there are more close contacts with group gatherings in schools, we strongly appeal to schools to join hands with us and encourage all school staff and staff of boarding sections of special schools to actively participate in the COVID-19 testing to safeguard the health of individuals, students and other teaching staff so as to minimise the risk of transmission in schools and the community."

The spokesman stressed that the TGTS mainly targets school staff and staff of boarding sections of special schools who have not had any signs of illness. If any school staff are feeling unwell (even the symptoms may be very mild), they must not return to the school and should seek medical advice promptly to receive appropriate diagnoses and treatments. For school staff and students who perceive themselves to have a higher risk of infection and experience mild discomfort, the EDB also encourages them to receive testing at the general out-patient clinics or Accident and Emergency Departments operated by the Hospital Authority. The EDB urges all parties in schools to continue to observe the "Health Protection Measures for Schools" issued earlier by the EDB and the "Health Advice to Schools for the Prevention of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)" issued by the CHP to put in place all the anti-epidemic preventive measures.