

FEHD arranges COVID-19 testing for SSSH stakeholders (with photo)

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) said today (July 29) that in view of the recent COVID-19 cases related to the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), the FEHD has arranged COVID-19 testing for all SSSH stakeholders, including the operator, importers, buyers and transportation companies, so as to have the infected persons isolated as soon as possible.

The testing agency (Prenetics Limited) collects deep throat saliva samples from all SSSH stakeholders today and tomorrow, and will then immediately commence the testing work in order to complete the virus tests as soon as possible.

Separately, two more workers in the slaughterhouse had preliminarily positive results from their COVID-19 tests. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) has also notified yesterday (July 28) that the three earlier preliminary positive cases have been changed to confirmed cases. In addition to the two confirmed cases announced by the CHP previously, there are so far a cumulative total of seven cases related to the SSSH, i.e. two preliminarily tested positive cases and five confirmed cases.

The two workers concerned in the new cases are both responsible for handling livestock sundry duties at the lairage area in the slaughterhouse. The stakeholders of the SSSH have taken the initiative to procure from private medical institutions at their own expense to conduct COVID-19 tests for their employees. The two persons have been preliminarily tested positive yesterday and today respectively. They last performed duties at SSSH on July 24 and July 27 respectively.

The SSSH immediately reported the cases to the CHP, and conducted thorough cleaning and disinfection at places where the persons concerned had stayed or commuted. It has also reminded all workers that if they feel unwell, they should seek medical advice as soon as possible and should not go to work.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The Government is very concerned about the cases in relation to SSSH, and will strive to ensure the smooth operation of the slaughterhouse and that the supply of live pigs will not be affected. The Government and SSSH have reviewed the purchase and sale process and has implemented social distancing measures in the slaughterhouse. It will closely monitor the latest development and further step up the anti-epidemic measures in light of the on-the-ground situation."

The spokesman said that the operation of the SSSH has remained normal, and it has strived to ensure that its operation meets the required hygienic and environmental standards, and that all meat supplied to the market is fit for human consumption. The FEHD and CHP have contacted the operator to better

understand the situation, and have immediately implemented all necessary measures and follow-up work to safeguard public hygiene and public health.

The CHP has already contacted the new cases involving the two workers for investigation and has traced their close contacts in the slaughterhouse. Arrangements will be made for them to be tested or isolated if necessary.

Upon receiving notification of the first preliminary confirmed case found to be related to a worker in the slaughterhouse last Friday, SSSH, in addition to regularly undertaking daily thorough cleaning and disinfection work according to the daily clearance arrangement, has immediately conducted additional strengthened deep cleaning and disinfection work at its surrounding areas, offices, rest areas and public facilities in the past few days.

During the epidemic, the SSSH has required all workers to observe the personal protective equipment guidelines, and implemented the following anti-epidemic measures:

- (1) Install two infrared body temperature monitors at the entrance to ensure that only people with normal body temperature are allowed to enter the slaughterhouse;
- (2) Require all people to wear a mask when they are in the slaughterhouse;
- (3) Require all people to maintain social distancing and avoid gathering;
- (4) Provide alcohol-based handrub and remind all people to keep their hands clean; and
- (5) Remind all those working in the slaughterhouse to observe personal hygiene, and that if they feel unwell, they should seek medical advice as soon as possible and should not go to work.

To further protect the health and safety of the workers working at the lairage area, in addition to requiring all workers to wear a face mask and maintain appropriate social distance in the slaughterhouse, all workers working at the lairage area are additionally given a protective gown every day as enhanced protection.

The spokesman stressed that members of the public need not be worried about the food safety of meat slaughtered at the slaughterhouse. According to the current scientific information and advice of the World Health Organization (WHO), it is unlikely that humans will be infected with COVID-19 via food. Members of the public are unlikely to be infected via fresh meat slaughtered at the slaughterhouse.

Nevertheless, the Centre for Food Safety, based on the WHO advice on food safety, reminds the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times, including washing hands before and after handling raw and cooked foods; separating raw meat and internal organs from cooked foods; cooking food thoroughly, avoiding to eat raw or undercooked animals, etc. so as to ensure food safety.

