

FEHD reminds cold store practitioners to comply with latest compulsory testing requirements on COVID-19

In view of the ongoing severe situation of COVID-19 infection around the world and the higher transmissibility of mutant strains which has a much faster rate of spread, the Government has strengthened the COVID-19 testing for cold store practitioners etc. under the groups of higher risks of exposure. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) spokesman today (November 15) reminded cold store operators and practitioners that the Government has included designated cold store practitioners in the compulsory testing notice and the relevant persons have to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 regularly from November 17 (Wednesday).

Under the compulsory testing notice to be gazetted under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap 599J), cold store practitioners (including full-time, part-time, casual and relief staff, and staff under a hire-of-service contract with cold stores) who would enter the warehouse in which articles of food are stored under refrigeration inside the cold store; or come into contact with or be involved in loading / unloading of articles of food which require refrigeration, during their work or providing service, will be required to undergo testing compulsorily. Those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course are required to get tested once every three days, while those who have not yet completed a COVID-19 vaccination course (including staff who are unfit to receive vaccination at the moment because of health reasons) are required to get tested on a daily basis.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "To arrange more frequent regular virus testing for cold store practitioners is an anti-epidemic measure by the Government to guard against the importation of cases and the resurgence of local infections and to complement the proactive 'zero infection' strategy. The stepped-up testing also enables staff who are exposed to higher infection risks during work to return to the community safely after work and offer protection to their families and friends in daily life."

In addition, as the Government no longer accepts deep throat saliva specimen for compulsory or regular testing, the testing of all targeted group persons (inclusive of designated cold store practitioners), whether they have completed a vaccination course or not, must be done by using combined nasal and throat swabs collected by professionals. Also, to facilitate designated cold store practitioners included in the compulsory testing requirement, FEHD will provide additional mobile testing services for them starting from November 17. Apart from community testing centres (CTCs), eligible persons may make use of mobile specimen collection stations in various districts (such as Sha Tsui Road Playground in Tsuen Wan) and mobile specimen collection trucks set up in Sha Tin District and Kwai Tsing District to

undergo testing. Relevant details will be uploaded to the FEHD webpage. Designated cold store practitioners are required to present a relevant vaccination record or medical certificate, and valid documentary proof provided by cold store operator to the staff of CTCs, mobile specimen collection stations or mobile specimen collection trucks for verification purpose in order to receive free testing. Furthermore, cold store operators will be required to register the number of their staff vaccinated and the relevant information online through the FEHD's webpage.

The FEHD has held a briefing session for cold store practitioners early this month to explain the latest testing arrangement, and will issue letters to cold store operators to remind them to comply with the relevant testing requirement and pay attention to take adequate personal protection measures. The FEHD has also prepared a set of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers to enable them to master the relevant information. Relevant details will be uploaded onto the FEHD webpages.

The spokesman appealed to the practitioners concerned to comply with the latest directions and arrangements to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission. They are also reminded to pay attention to take adequate personal protection measures at all times.