

FHB responds to media enquiries

In response to media enquiries on the testing arrangements for confirmed cases number 7916 and number 8249 of COVID-19, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) responded as follows on December 22:

The Government has been taking a multi-pronged approach to strengthen surveillance and testing efforts in order to identify cases in the community as soon as possible and help cut the transmission chains. The Government provides free tests for members of the public through various channels, including public clinics and private doctors, for regular surveillance and early identification of confirmed cases, but not for private purposes (e.g. for work or travel certificates for individuals). The above-mentioned regular testing is handled and followed up by the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA).

With regards to the tests under the above-mentioned types of surveillance, the practice that has been adopted is that people whose test results are confirmed as positive by the DH will be notified by the Department by phone in accordance with the established procedures and will be arranged to be sent to a public hospital for isolation and treatment; while those who are tested negative will not be notified. The general advice of the DH and the HA is that a person can assume a negative test result if he or she has not been notified a few days after doing the test.

The Government understands that members of the public want to be notified of the results after taking the test. In response to public demand, the FHB, the DH and the HA have gradually improved their computer systems since the end of November in order to notify people who have been tested negative via SMS messages. During the process of changing the computer system, due to technical problems in the relevant system, some people have not received the SMS messages containing their negative test results after being tested.

After discovering the above technical problems, the Government has immediately taken remedial measures and the problems are expected to be resolved within a short period of time. We estimate that since end November, about 800 citizens (including case number 7916 and case number 8249) have failed to receive an SMS message containing their negative test results after receiving a free test provided by the Government, and there is no positive case among them. After the system is rectified, individual citizens will receive SMS messages containing the results of earlier tests automatically sent by the system. We extend apologies to the affected citizens.

At present, people will receive SMS messages containing their negative test results if they receive free testing at community testing centres, or obtain specimen bottles through private doctors, designated General Out-patient Clinics of the HA, post offices and MTR stations and return the specimen samples for testing. We will continue to improve the system so that people receiving tests can be notified of the test results via SMS messages

within 48 hours as far as possible.