

FHB thanks the public for co-operation in compulsory testing

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) thanked the general public for their co-operation in undergoing compulsory testing for fighting the virus together on May 1.

The Government has been adopting the new direction for fighting the pandemic since mid-April. Targeted border control and infection control measures were introduced to safeguard Hong Kong against imported cases and prevent cases from spreading locally.

The spokesman said, "For local cases with unknown sources of infection involving mutant strains, the Government has to be decisive in adopting swiftly stringent testing and quarantine measures, with an aim to cutting the transmission chains as soon as possible. Otherwise, the whole society will have to bear significant consequence when there is a major outbreak."

Testing has been an integral part of the strategy in preventing and fighting the virus. The Government has been implementing the Targeted Group Testing Scheme for high-risk and high-exposure groups and essential staff of critical infrastructure and services, etc since mid-2020. Around 3.4 million tests have been conducted so far. Among them, all foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) were offered a one-off free test on a voluntary basis at community testing centres (CTCs) from mid-December 2020 to end February this year. Over 34 000 FDHs, equivalent to less than 10 per cent of the total number of FDHs in Hong Kong, had received voluntary testing at CTCs during the period. Under the new direction for fighting the pandemic, high-risk or high-exposure groups such as staff members of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes, as well as most of the frontline staff of catering businesses, are required to undergo regular testing if they have not completed a COVID-19 vaccination course.

"The Government requested on April 30 that all FDHs in Hong Kong who had yet to complete a COVID-19 vaccination course to receive testing on a compulsory basis on or before May 9. In accordance with the established practice, the relevant decision was made solely on public health grounds after detailed risk assessment. The factors that have been taken into account include that two recent cases involving N501Y mutant strain were FDHs, the transmissibility of mutant strains is higher, the sources of infection of the cases were not known, and that the confirmed case had gatherings and contacts with other FDHs during the incubation and infection periods, etc.

"Although the sheer number of FDHs in Hong Kong would impose challenges to the local testing capacity in the short term, we need to keep up our efforts in testing high-risk, high-exposure and high transmissibility risk groups in order to cut the latent transmission chains in the community as early as possible. The Government would like to express gratitude to all

those who received test today, including FDHs, for their patience and understanding. The Government will enhance testing capacity in the coming few days to enable the public to receive testing. We also encourage them to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and their family members."

Those who completed a COVID-19 vaccination course would be taken as having complied with the requirements in the compulsory testing notices. They would also be exempted from regular testing. The two vaccines currently recognised in Hong Kong are safe and effective, and have been received by tens of millions of people worldwide. Getting vaccinated can protect oneself and those around. It is the best way to fight the virus. Most people are fit for getting vaccinated.

"In view of the threat posed by the mutant strains, it is imperative for us to get vaccinated. While there is still shortage in COVID-19 vaccines internationally, the two vaccines procured by the Government are sufficient for all Hong Kong people to get vaccinated. At present, there are still plenty of unutilized quotas in the 29 community vaccination centres and over 1000 private clinics. We call on the public to treasure the vaccine supply in Hong Kong and get vaccinated as soon as possible."

The Government reminds persons subject to compulsory testing, including FDHs, that they may choose to undergo COVID-19 virus testing via the following routes:

1. To visit any of the mobile specimen collection stations (see the list and target groups (if applicable) at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html) for testing;
2. To attend any of the community testing centres (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/);
3. To obtain a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 121 post offices, vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations or 47 designated general outpatient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority (HA) and return the specimen to one of the designated specimen collection points (see the distribution points and times, and the specimen collection points and times, at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);
4. To undergo testing at any of the GOPCs of the Hospital Authority as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority;
5. To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories which are recognised by the Department of Health (DH) and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories_RTPCR.pdf); or
6. To use a specimen bottle distributed to the relevant specified premises by the Centre for Health Protection (if applicable), and return the specimen bottle with the sample collected as per relevant guidelines.

Currently, there are a total of 21 community testing centres providing testing service for the public, including free service for persons subject to compulsory testing. The number of tests available for appointments at community testing centres has been increased to over 38 000 per day, and additional manpower has been deployed to serve the public. As of 6pm today, there are more than 40 000 booking places available for the next eight days

(May 2 to 9) at the 21 community testing centres. Booking and walk-in services are available. Members of the public only need to provide simple personal information on the 24-hour booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en). Booking status of centres for the coming week will be shown for public's selection of suitable testing centre and time slot for testing. The testing centres will accord priority to serve individuals with advance bookings. Members of the public may call the testing centres for enquiries on the availability of bookings or walk-in quotas before visiting the centres.

In view of the surge in testing demand within a short period of time, the Government has set up 18 new mobile specimen collection stations in a number of districts today, bringing the total number of stations to 35. The Government will add one more station for FDHs at Kowloon Park tomorrow (May 2), and extend the operating hours of the stations set up by the Labour Department and the Food and Health Bureau at four popular gathering places of FDHs to 8pm to further enable FDHs to undergo testing. Coupled with the 21 community testing centres, there will be a total of 57 community testing centres/mobile specimen collection stations in various districts tomorrow to provide free service for persons subject to compulsory testing. Among them, 55 stations are open to FDHs for free testing. The opening dates and operating hours of the mobile specimen collection stations in various districts providing free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing services for the general public are stated in Annex.

In addition, persons subject to compulsory testing can obtain deep throat saliva specimen collection packs at designated hours at 47 HA GOPCs, 121 post offices or vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations for free on a first-come-first-served basis while stocks last; and return their specimens to the 47 HA GOPCs, 13 designated clinics of the DH or 23 specimen collection points at Government premises. Over the past few weeks, the Government has distributed an average of some 30 000 to 40 000 specimen collection packs daily, and the average number of specimen bottles collected per day was less than 20 000, which is around half of the amount distributed. The Government appealed to the public and organisations again to refrain from collecting excessive sets of packs so that others in need can also obtain specimen collection packs for testing. The Government will also continue to review the usage and public demand for the testing service, and make suitable adjustments to the relevant service.