

## Foreign domestic helpers to undergo second round of compulsory testing

The Government will exercise the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) and publish in the Gazette a compulsory testing notice, which requires all foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) working in Hong Kong to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test for the second time during the period from May 15 to May 30.

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A Government spokesman thanked the 340 000 FDHs who contributed to the anti-epidemic efforts by complying with the compulsory testing requirement early this month, under which three confirmed cases involving the N501Y mutant strain were detected in a timely manner to cut the latent transmission chain in the community. During the same period (i.e. May 1 to May 9), over 470 000 people also underwent testing at community testing centres and mobile specimen collection stations as they had been present at the premises which had been visited by confirmed cases involving the N501Y mutant strain, or because they belong to certain sectors or groups subject to regular testing. The Government also thanked them for their co-operation and support.

"One of the close contacts had contact with case 11672 as early as April 13, and yet was only confirmed as being infected yesterday (May 11). This shows that the incubation period of the N501Y mutant strain could be relatively long. Also, upon infection, a few confirmed cases belonging to the same cluster had multiple visits to places where FDHs commonly gather, and some of them had taken off their masks during the period, thus increasing the transmission risks. We have to take the most cautious approach to reduce the risk of a community outbreak and would rather be strict than lax. After risk assessment and taking into account the job nature of FDHs who have to take care of the elderly and children, we consider it prudent to require FDHs to undergo compulsory testing for a second time in view of the above cluster. The testing arrangement is a separate issue from the Labour and Welfare Bureau's announcement yesterday that it would not pursue the suggestion of requiring FDHs to receive vaccination when applying for employment visas," the spokesman said.

The testing period covers 16 days, including three weekends, to enable FDHs to arrange time for testing. The Government will work with the operators to enhance the testing capacity of community testing centres and mobile specimen collection stations particularly over the weekends. As at 3pm on May 12, there were over 600 000 testing slots available for booking during the period from May 15 to May 30. The spokesman called on employers to arrange for FDHs to undergo testing at community testing centres on weekdays as far as possible and make bookings in advance, to prevent FDHs from gathering and queuing for testing on Saturdays and Sundays. Mobile specimen collection stations tentatively scheduled for this weekend are listed in the Annex.

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As with the previous round of compulsory testing, the FDHs who have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine for 14 days are exempted from undergoing the test. Specifically, FDHs who have received the second dose of COVID-19 vaccination on May 16 or before could be exempted from testing. For persons who received COVID-19 vaccines in places outside Hong Kong and have received all of the recommended dose(s) of a COVID-19 vaccine on or before May 16, they will also be regarded to have completed the vaccination course of the relevant COVID-19 vaccine, subject to the vaccine used being included on the list of vaccines recognised for this purpose as published on the Government's "COVID-19 Thematic Website" ([www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/list\\_of\\_recognised\\_covid19\\_vaccines.pdf](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/list_of_recognised_covid19_vaccines.pdf)). The Government reminded exempted FDHs to download their electronic vaccination records or save the printouts of their vaccination records to their mobile phones, or bring along the printouts or copies of their vaccination records, so as to prove eligibility for exemption.

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The spokesman stressed that the Government has all along been implementing anti-epidemic measures based on risk assessment. Compulsory testing arrangements equally apply to persons in other high-risk sectors or those who are in contact with a considerable number of high-risk persons during their work. For example, staff of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes have been subject to 14 rounds of compulsory testing since December last year, and over 460 000 specimens have been tested through community testing centres/temporary testing centres/mobile specimen collection stations.

The spokesman thanked FDHs and employers for their understanding and co-operation. Any person who fails to comply with a compulsory testing notice commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months. The Government will strictly follow up on whether relevant persons had complied with the testing notices.