

Fourth round of COVID-19 testing for RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes commences

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (October 20) that the fourth round of free COVID-19 testing services will be arranged for staff members of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) and nursing homes (including full-time staff, part-time staff, imported staff, relief staff and outsourced contract service workers such as out-patient escort staff) from tomorrow (October 21). This round of testing will last for about three weeks and the SWD appeals to the staff members of the aforementioned institutions for their active participation.

In this exercise, testing will also be arranged on a trial basis for some residents of the aforementioned institutions, namely:

- newly admitted residents;
- residents who need to go out for medical purposes, rehabilitation training, work or other reasons;
- service users of day care/rehabilitation services units attached to residential care homes; and
- other residents who are willing to undergo testing.

Participants have to collect their deep throat saliva specimens by themselves for testing. Specimens tested with a preliminarily positive COVID-19 result will be referred to the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Department of Health for confirmatory tests. Confirmed cases will be followed up and announced by the Centre for Health Protection.

Apart from the aforementioned institutions, the SWD has provided free testing services on a voluntary basis for staff of subvented/subsidised welfare service units at a higher risk since September 28. A total of 1 100 welfare units including community care service units for the elderly and persons with disabilities, other residential care service units, child care centres, day training service units for persons with disabilities, etc, have been invited to join the testing in which deep throat saliva specimens are collected. The testing programme is still underway. A spokesman for the SWD appeals again to the units and staff members who have not yet joined the programme for their active participation.

The spokesman said that the testings aim to identify asymptomatic COVID-19 patients as early as possible and minimise the risk of infection for social welfare service users who are physically frail. Staff members and residents of institutions and social welfare organisations are urged to participate in the testing programme for the sake of protecting themselves and others. The spokesman also called on family members of the residents to

encourage their relatives residing in the institutions to join the testing programme.

The spokesman emphasised that, as always, personal data of staff members and service users is well protected throughout the testing workflow. The testing service providers do not need, and will not gain access to, the data concerned.