

Government adjusts boarding, quarantine and testing arrangements for inbound travellers and extends arrangement of place-specific flight suspension mechanism

The Government announces today (January 27) that from February 5, the compulsory quarantine period for inbound travellers from overseas places will be adjusted to 14 days in designated quarantine hotels (DQHs), to be followed by a seven-day self-monitoring period. Meanwhile, the place-specific flight suspension mechanism for Australia, Canada, France, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States of America will be extended for 14 days to February 18.

Adjustment of quarantine and testing requirements for inbound travellers

According to the information from the World Health Organization, the Omicron variant has been transmitting around the world. As the latest scientific data suggest, while the transmission of Omicron variant is faster, its incubation period is shorter. The Centre for Health Protection has adjusted earlier, in accordance with expert recommendations, the quarantine period of close contacts of locally acquired cases to 14 days. Noting the relevant data and expert recommendation, the Government will, from 0.00am on February 5, implement corresponding quarantine arrangements for inbound travellers from overseas places.

As transmission of the Omicron variant is already very prevalent in overseas places, all overseas places will be specified as Group A specified places. The quarantine arrangements for all Group A specified places will be aligned and the enhanced surveillance arrangement will no longer be implemented. Hong Kong residents who have stayed in a Group A specified place in the previous 14 days can only board a flight for Hong Kong if they have been fully vaccinated (Note) and hold a recognised vaccination record. They will have to undergo compulsory quarantine in a DQH for 14 days upon returning to Hong Kong, with six tests to be conducted during quarantine, to be followed by self-monitoring for seven days, and compulsory testing on the 16th and 19th days of arrival at Hong Kong, where the test to be taken on the 19th day must be conducted in a community testing centre. Non-Hong Kong residents who have stayed in Group A specified places will not be allowed to enter Hong Kong.

Other existing boarding requirements will remain unchanged, including presenting at boarding a negative result proof of a polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 with specimen collected within 48

hours before the scheduled time of departure of the aircraft, and confirmation of room reservation in a DQH for the applicable compulsory quarantine period.

For persons who arrived at Hong Kong before February 5 and are required to undergo the 15th to 21st days of quarantine in DQHs on or after February 5 as per the original quarantine orders (i.e. inbound travellers from overseas who arrive at Hong Kong between January 16 and February 4), the Department of Health will arrange for them to undergo relevant testing by batches in an orderly manner before the completion of quarantine. If they obtain a negative test result and have completed at least 14 days of quarantine, they will be arranged to leave the DQHs in turn. Upon departure from the DQHs, the relevant persons will need to self-monitor from the 15th to 21st days of arrival at Hong Kong, and undergo compulsory testing on the 16th and 19th days of arrival at Hong Kong.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation of different places, and will consider a basket of factors under the risk-based principle, including public health considerations such as epidemic situation in particular places, testing rate, vaccination rate, volume of travellers and actual imported cases, as well as other local socio-economic factors to adjust the grouping arrangements based on risk levels as the situation warrants.

The boarding, quarantine, and testing arrangements for persons arriving at Hong Kong from overseas places are set out at the Annex.

The above adjusted boarding, quarantine, and testing arrangements will also be applicable to foreign domestic helpers who undergo compulsory quarantine in designated quarantine facilities. Details to be announced by the Labour Department later.

Extension of the place-specific flight suspension mechanism

The Government earlier invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to implement the place-specific flight suspension mechanism from January 8 (Hong Kong time) for Australia, Canada, France, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The relevant measure was to be maintained until February 4. Noting that the local epidemic situation has been severe, and there has all along been many Hong Kong residents returning from these eight places, in order to prevent imported cases from posing additional pressure on the medical system at this crucial juncture of curbing the local epidemic situation, the Government will extend the place-specific flight suspension mechanism for two weeks. From February 5 to February 18, all passenger flights from these eight places will be prohibited from landing in Hong Kong, and at the same time, persons who have stayed in these places for more than two hours within 14 days will be restricted from boarding passenger flights for Hong Kong, so as to stop persons from the relevant places from travelling to Hong Kong via transit.

The Government will review in due course whether the place-specific flight suspension mechanism should be lifted or continued by taking into account the latest global and local epidemic developments.

A Government spokesman said, "We understand that the place-specific flight suspension mechanism is an extremely stringent emergency measure, and the relevant measure will inevitably affect the return journeys of Hong Kong residents returning from these eight places. However, we must act decisively to lower the risk to the local epidemic situation so as to quickly quell the epidemic situation, such that it would not be necessary to maintain the most stringent prevention and control measures for a long time."

The Government will gazette the relevant updated specifications under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C), the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E), Cap. 599H, and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to effect the above measures from 0.00am on February 5 (Hong Kong Time).

Note: Relevant persons who are fully-vaccinated and hold a recognised vaccination record, as well as children under 12-year-old accompanied by them, can board for Hong Kong. In addition, persons who (i) are unfit for vaccination due to health reasons with relevant proof from a medical practitioner; or (ii) have received one dose of recognised COVID-19 vaccine and hold a recognised vaccination record, if they were certified by a medical practitioner that they were unfit to receive the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine because of health reasons after receiving the first dose of vaccine, are exceptionally allowed to board for Hong Kong.