Government announces additional rapid antigen test to “test-and-hold” arrangements at airport

The Government announced today (May 6) that with effect from May 9, an additional rapid antigen test (RAT) will be conducted during the "test-and-hold" at the airport to strengthen the testing arrangements for inbound persons for earlier detection and isolation of infected persons, and to enhance the process of closed-loop management from the airport to designated quarantine hotels (DQHs) so as to shorten the waiting time for inbound persons at the airport.

Starting from 0.00am on May 9, all persons arriving at Hong Kong via Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) from overseas places or Taiwan will be required to undergo a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nucleic acid test by professional swab sampling as well as an RAT with professional specimen collection at the same time upon arrival under the "test-and-hold" arrangement at the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) at the airport. If the RAT result of the relevant person is negative, he or she can then proceed with immigration procedures, and upon the instruction of the staff on site be transferred by designated transport to DQHs where he or she will wait for the nucleic acid test result and undergo compulsory quarantine under closed-loop management. If the result of the nucleic acid test is also negative, the relevant quarantined person can continue his or her compulsory quarantine in DQHs. He or she will be subject to daily RATs as well as nucleic acid tests on the fifth and 12th days of arrival at Hong Kong.

If any result of an RAT or nucleic acid test during "test-and-hold" arrangement or quarantine is positive and the relevant inbound person is classified as a confirmed case, he or she will be transferred to a community isolation facility hotel (CIF hotel) for isolation should he or she have no obvious symptoms and does not need any medical support. For those requiring treatment, they will be transferred to a public hospital facility for treatment and monitoring. The presence of viral genome fragments inside the body of some recovered persons who had infected COVID-19 may still be detectable through nucleic acid tests. In this regard, for inbound persons who have tested positive by nucleic acid tests with a low viral load during the "test-and-hold" arrangement at HKIA or compulsory quarantine in DQHs and are recovered persons infected within 90 days, the Department of Health will, having regard to data of the nucleic acid test results and recovery records, consider whether the persons concerned should not be classified as confirmed cases and allow them to continue to undergo compulsory quarantine in the DQHs instead of transferring them to CIF hotels for compulsory isolation.

A Government spokesman said, "The relevant arrangements ensure the continued stringent control and management of importation risks while further shortening the stay of relevant inbound passengers at the airport."

The abovementioned arrangements will not be applicable to persons arriving via HKIA from the Mainland or Macao who are subject to home quarantine, those who come to Hong Kong under the Return2hk Scheme or the Come2hk Scheme and are thus exempted from compulsory quarantine, and other inbound persons who are not required to undergo compulsory quarantine in DQHs. These relevant inbound persons must undergo a nucleic acid test at the TSCC at the airport. They can only proceed with their immigration procedures upon confirmation of negative nucleic acid test results.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation of different places in accordance with the principle of guarding against the importation of cases. A basket of factors, including public health factors such as epidemic situation in particular places, testing rate, vaccination rate, volume of arrivals and actual imported cases, as well as the developments of the local epidemic situation and relevant local socio-economic factors, will be considered under the risk-based principle to adjust the boarding, quarantine and testing requirements for overseas arrivals based on risk levels as the situation warrants.