

Government announces comprehensive tightening of quarantine exemption arrangements

â€‹The Government today (November 1) announced that quarantine exemption arrangements will be comprehensively tightened with effect from November 12. Monitoring on exempted persons will also be strengthened. The new measures to be implemented include:

- (1) Cancellation of quarantine exemption arrangements for most of the exemption categories of persons upon their arrival in Hong Kong; and
- (2) Requiring consular and diplomatic officers to be subject to self-isolation at designated quarantine hotels (DQHs) upon their arrival in Hong Kong. Home isolation is not allowed (except for consuls general or representatives in Hong Kong at equivalent/higher level).

A Government spokesman said, "The new measures will strengthen the prevention of importation of cases and tackle the threat posed by mutant strains by further minimising the chance of transmission of the virus from imported cases into the community so as to foster favourable conditions for resuming cross-boundary travel with the Mainland and cross-border travel in future."

Cancellation of most exemption categories

To maintain necessary operation of Hong Kong's society and economy and to ensure an uninterrupted supply of all daily necessities to the public, the Government has exempted certain categories of persons who fulfilled relevant criteria from the compulsory quarantine requirement upon arrival in Hong Kong in accordance with the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E). Criteria for the entry of the persons include that it is necessary for the normal operation of Hong Kong or governmental operation, protection of the safety of health of the people of Hong Kong or serving the public interest of Hong Kong. Currently, there are respectively 36 and 12 categories of persons exempted from quarantine in accordance with the relevant criteria under Cap. 599C and Cap. 599E.

With effect from November 12, the Government will cancel the exemption arrangements for most of the exemption categories of persons upon arrival in Hong Kong. Only categories that are necessary to maintain the continuing functioning of the community and supply of necessities will be retained (i.e. cross-boundary goods vehicle/coach drivers, crew members of aircraft, sea crew of cargo vessels loading/unloading in Hong Kong, government officials, etc). Details are stated in the Annex.

Upon implementation of the above new measures, the exemption categories in accordance with Cap. 599C and Cap. 599E will be significantly reduced to five and three categories respectively. For any person who does not fall under these categories and requires travel to Hong Kong with quarantine exemption, the Government will only consider the case on an individual exceptional basis under stringent scrutiny.

All exempted persons must comply with certain sets of stringent epidemic prevention measures and conditions to mitigate the risk of transmission and coming into contact with the public, including requirements on repeated regular testing and strict restriction on the location of self-isolation or movement so as to adhere to the principle of closed-loop management. These conditions were tightened on multiple occasions in accordance with the global and local epidemic situation and the risk assessment of respective exemption categories.

The spokesman said, "In accordance with the risk-level assessment by the Centre for Health Protection, the Government has been considering all relevant factors comprehensively to review and adjust the exemption arrangements for exempted persons. Exemption arrangements for cross-boundary goods vehicle drivers going between the Mainland and Hong Kong, freight crew and passenger crew members of aircraft and sea crew for cargo operation on vessels in Hong Kong are necessary for ensuring an uninterrupted supply of goods and daily necessities and maintaining necessary economic activities. The Government has imposed rigorous epidemic prevention measures and exemption conditions on the exempted persons and will suitably adjust the arrangements in accordance with the epidemic development."

Self-isolation requirement at DQHs for consular and diplomatic officers

Pursuant to the prevailing policy on quarantine exemption, government officials carrying out governmental duties is one of the exemption categories. These officials include consuls general or equivalent of the consulates general in Hong Kong and their immediate family members.

At present, except for consuls general or representatives in Hong Kong at equivalent/higher level, all other government officials carrying out governmental duties who have stayed in overseas places during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong must be subject to self-isolation at their accommodation upon arrival in Hong Kong. During the self-isolation period, they are not allowed to leave the self-isolation location and come into contact with the public. They must undergo repeated testing during the self-isolation period. However, there have been two imported cases of COVID-19 involving four persons who were under this exemption category confirmed with COVID-19 infection during their self-isolation period in the past. Measures must therefore be taken to manage the risk more effectively.

Starting from November 12, consular and diplomatic officers carrying out governmental duties (except for consuls general or representatives in Hong

Kong at equivalent/higher level) who have stayed in overseas places during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong must be subject to self-isolation at DQs during a specified period. Home isolation is not allowed. On the other hand, consuls general or representatives in Hong Kong at equivalent/higher level must be subject to self-isolation at accommodation and are not allowed to leave the self-isolation location as well as come into contact with the public throughout the specified period.

The spokesman said, "The exemption status and the itineraries of the consular and diplomatic officers carrying out governmental duties are determined by their official capacity and relevant official duties with a view to safeguarding normal operation of the governments. Nevertheless, we consider there is a need to tighten respective exemption arrangements to strengthen the prevention of imported cases as well as avoid the respective exempted persons coming into contact with the local community during the exemption period."

The Government has issued letters to the respective consulates general to urge relevant persons to strictly comply with the exemption conditions.

Strengthening monitoring on exempted persons

At present, the relevant policy bureaux or departments monitor the compliance with exemption conditions by the exempted persons under their sponsorship. The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) has a dedicated team to conduct checking on exempted persons and audits in relation to the monitoring of exempted persons. To ensure exempted persons fully implement the principle of closed-loop management when carrying out their designated activities in Hong Kong, the relevant policy bureaux or departments have designated co-ordinators specifically tasked to monitor the exempted persons concerned. The FHB has requested the relevant bureaux or departments to adopt a checklist to confirm and record that the exempted persons under restricted activities have complied with the requirements of various guidelines. The Government will strengthen the monitoring on all exempted persons with a view to minimising the chance of transmission of the virus from imported cases into the community.

The spokesman reminded, "The respective organisation must take every practicable measure to ensure that the exempted persons comply with all exemption conditions. Any breach of exemption conditions will result in revocation of the exemption status and the relevant persons will be transferred to the quarantine centres for compulsory quarantine. In addition, exempted persons are subject to medical surveillance during the exemption period. According to section 15 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation, those who contravene the conditions in the Notification of Medical Surveillance will be liable to a fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment for six months."

Please refer to www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/599C-quarantine_exemption.html and

www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/599E-quarantine_exemption.html for details on the respective categories of exempted persons, and www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/inbound-travel.html for details on relevant boarding, quarantine and testing requirements.