

Government announces enhanced anti-epidemic measures for designated quarantine hotels

The Government announced today (May 13) that a number of enhancement measures are being put in place to further strengthen the infection control at designated quarantine hotels.

To guard against the importation of COVID-19 cases into Hong Kong, persons arriving at Hong Kong from overseas are subject to testing and compulsory quarantine requirements under a set of stringent inbound prevention and control measures. For persons arriving at Hong Kong, apart from undergoing the "test-and-hold" arrangement at the airport, they will also be subject to further tests while undergoing compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotels. The Government has earlier announced that while adjusting the compulsory quarantine periods for fully vaccinated arrivals, the corresponding testing arrangements will also be enhanced at the same time to ensure that even with the shortened compulsory quarantine periods, no case would slip through the net by testing as far as possible.

Apart from the existing pre-departure and/or post-arrival tests, the Government will introduce an additional test on the third day of arrival. Depending on the risk levels of places where the persons arriving at Hong Kong depart from and the applicable compulsory quarantine periods, the number of tests these persons subject to during compulsory quarantine will also be increased to two (for 7-day compulsory quarantine period) to four times (for 21-day compulsory quarantine period). Furthermore, persons arriving at Hong Kong from extremely high-risk or very high-risk specified places, or fully vaccinated persons with shortened quarantine periods, will also be required to undergo additional compulsory tests upon the completion of compulsory quarantine (details at Annex).

To strengthen quality assurance of testing, the Government has introduced new contract terms for the contractors providing testing services at designated quarantine hotels. Currently, the role of swab takers are in general taken up by registered nurses or enrolled nurses. The new contract terms specify that all swab takers shall either be a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse, with experience in infection control and specimen collection by swabbing. The contractors shall also provide at least one officer-in-charge of specimen collection bearing the qualification of registered medical practitioner, registered nurse or other healthcare professionals with at least three years' experience in management and supervision; knowledge and experience in infection control; as well as experience in specimen collection by swabbing. The officer-in-charge shall supervise and ensure that the specimen collection process conducted under the contracts meets the standard of the Department of Health.

Regarding the combined nasal and throat swab, the Government held a

demonstration of training session on May 4 for representatives of the two existing contractors. Attendees were briefed in details the infection control procedures, swabbing technique in performing combined nasal and throat swab sample collection and other precautionary measures to be taken when conducting the tests in designated quarantine hotel settings. According to the contract terms, contractors shall be responsible for conducting regular training for their staff and keep proper record of the relevant training for inspection by the Government. The relevant training demonstration can help the contractors conduct training for their staff with a view to ensuring both the quality of swabbing and procedure of infection control that meet the stringent requirement.

Under the new contract terms, contractors shall establish a self-auditing team to monitor the performance and proper compliance of their teams, including periodical assessment of the skills and knowledge of all frontline staff as well as regular refresher courses on a bi-weekly basis. Contractors shall also prepare detailed reports on staff qualification, training records, service log and self-auditing results. The Government shall evaluate the reports and follow up where necessary. If the contractor fails to meet all of the aforementioned requirements, the Government may terminate the contract at any time and debar the contractor from bidding for contracts in similar nature in future.

In view of the large number of returnees from high-risk areas staying at some designated quarantine hotels, the Government has advised the hotels to lower their occupancy rate to 80 per cent or below. In addition, air purifiers are being installed by all designated hotels on each floor where most of them have already completed doing so. The Government has advised hotels to segregate guests returning from high-risk areas and other areas in different zones (e.g. on different floors) as far as practicable. Hotels shall remind guests that all windows should be closed before opening their door or conducting combined nasal and throat swab sampling. Hotel staff shall be tested every seven days, instead of every 14 days.