

Government announces latest criteria for discharge from isolation and home quarantine

The Government announced today (February 26) the latest criteria for discharge from isolation for persons infected with COVID-19 and discharge from home quarantine for close contacts. Under a risk-based principle, eligible persons who have successively obtained negative test results may leave community isolation facilities (CIF) or home premises earlier to resume their daily activities.

At present, the Hospital Authority (HA) is striving to send infected persons with higher risks to hospitals as early as practicable. Infected persons with no or mild symptoms will be sent to CIFs whenever possible to undergo 14-day isolation arrangement. In case persons pending admission to hospitals or isolation facilities (hereinafter as "persons pending admission") cannot be sent to hospitals or CIFs in a timely manner during their wait at home, they may conduct a test on Day 14 after tested positive and leave home upon obtaining a negative test result. On the other hand, the Department of Health is implementing the "StayHomeSafe" Scheme to arrange close contacts deemed appropriate after assessment to undergo home quarantine for 14 days.

Based on the requirements previously announced, infected persons who have been sent to CIFs, persons pending admission and close contacts under home quarantine are required to undergo 14-day medical surveillance at CIF or home. They must also fulfil relevant testing requirements before being considered for completion of isolation or home quarantine.

In view of the latest epidemic development and risk assessment, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the HA have decided that infected persons who have been sent to CIFs and persons pending admission may conduct rapid antigen tests (RAT) on Day 6 and Day 7 after tested positive (currently the day following testing or collection of sample is counted as Day 1; if there is no such testing or collection record, the day on receiving the test result is counted as Day 1) should they have received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Similarly, close contacts who have received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccines may conduct RATs on Day 6 and Day 7 of the home quarantine period. If they obtain negative test results during RATs on these two successive days, they may leave CIF or home premises earlier on Day 7 for their daily activities. Conversely, if they obtain at least one positive test result during RATs on these two days, they will need to continue undergoing isolation or home quarantine in accordance with the original arrangement.

The latest criteria mentioned above is not applicable to those who have not been vaccinated or have only received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, as well as household contacts of close contacts who only need to undergo home

quarantine for four days under the "StayHomeSafe" Scheme.

The latest criteria enables relevant persons to ascertain through successive RATs that their transmission risks have been reduced to a very low level, thereby allowing them to resume daily activities earlier. This is also conducive to maintaining the daily operation and provision of essential services in Hong Kong. Given the recent proliferation of virus, the Government urges citizens to avoid going out unless strictly necessary and reduce social contacts, and encourages various trades to arrange employees to work from home whenever practicable, thus contributing to the joint efforts in containing the epidemic.

As for persons admitted to hospitals, the HA will exercise professional judgment on their specific discharge criteria. The doctor in charge will make clinical judgment, and assess the risk level of a person admitted to hospital upon clinical assessment. For example, if a patient is in clinically stable conditions, and his / her home premises or residential home environment is suitable or he / she will be accepted by other CIFs, the patient will be discharged from hospital as early as possible to stay at home, residential home or other appropriate facility until he / she obtains a negative result (unvaccinated persons on Day 14; vaccinated persons on Day 6 and Day 7). Only by then can the patient safely leave home, residential home or the facility.

A Government spokesperson said, "The above discharge arrangement adopted by the HA will increase the turnover of hospital beds, such that medical resources can be more effectively deployed on more imminent cases. We urge residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) to join the citywide anti-epidemic efforts, and allow the elderly who have been diagnosed by the HA as being in stable conditions to return for stay. If necessary, HA's Community Geriatric Assessment Team may offer support to RCHEs."