

Government announces list of recognised private laboratories for antibody test

The Government announced today (June 26) the list of recognised private medical laboratories for conducting recognised antibody test.

Having accepted the recommendation of the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (Joint Scientific Committee, JSC), the Government will, in a step-by-step manner taking into account experts' advice, implement antibody testing for the purpose of administering compulsory quarantine requirements on inbound travellers who have been fully vaccinated and tested positive for antibody.

Administering compulsory quarantine requirements must fulfill the following criteria:

- (1) The test is IgG/total antibody test against SARS-CoV-2 spike protein/surrogate neutralising antibody test;
- (2) The test is done by a recognised medical laboratory listed in Annex;
- (3) The test is done within three months (based on specimen collection date);
- (4) Laboratories in Group A (private medical laboratories with the test area of "virology-serology" accredited under the Hong Kong Laboratory Accreditation Scheme (HOKLAS)) may use any validated antibody testing platforms;
- (5) Laboratories in Group B (accredited private medical laboratories recognised by the Hong Kong Government's Laboratory Recognition Scheme without the "virology-serology" accreditation) may only use specified antibody testing platforms (currently include antibody testing platforms in use by the Hospital Authority); and
- (6) The test result must be reported in the prescribed format in paper form or in the electronic form on Government system to be rolled out separately.

The currently recognised antibody tests will be done by serology testing using blood drawn from veins. The decision to receive serology testing is completely voluntary and it is a self-paid arrangement.

For Phase 1 which will be effective from June 30, persons in Hong Kong may take a recognised antibody test before departing Hong Kong, and the documentary proof of such will be recognised for the purpose of administering the compulsory quarantine arrangements upon returning to Hong Kong. The Government will implement Phase 2 within July to provide self-paid recognised antibody test for inbound travellers at the airport subject to the implementation progress and latest epidemic developments. The arrangements for Phase 2 will be announced in due course.

Private medical laboratories which are not yet covered by the list in Annex but intend to provide recognised antibody test for travellers can obtain the above prescribed antibody tests in the scope of HOKLAS accreditation.

The spokesman said, "The relevant arrangements implement the interim recommendations of the JSC joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel made on June 9 (see separate press release) (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202106/21/P2021062100692.htm)"

As announced by the Government on June 21, the duration of compulsory quarantine for inbound travellers could be adjusted to seven days of quarantine at a designated quarantine hotel plus seven days of self-monitoring with multiple polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nucleic acid tests if they meet all the following three criteria:

- (1) Fully vaccinated with a vaccination record (Note);
- (2) Obtained a negative nucleic acid test result during "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival at Hong Kong; and
- (3) Possess positive result proof of a recognised serology antibody test conducted within the past three months.

The purpose of checking antibodies is to show evidence of response to vaccination.

Hong Kong has been maintaining strict border control measures against importation of cases to control the epidemic situation. The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation of various places, the prevalence of new virus variants, vaccination progress, and changes in the volume of cross-boundary passenger traffic, and will adjust the boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements for persons arriving at Hong Kong from relevant places as the situation warrants.

Note: Fully vaccinated means the suggested dosage has been administered in accordance with the relevant guidelines of a COVID-19 vaccination course at least 14 days prior to arrival at Hong Kong. The relevant vaccines administered should be those included on the List of COVID-19 Vaccines Recognised for Specified Purposes (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/list_of_recognised_covid19_vaccines.pdf). For travellers who have recovered from previous COVID-19 infection, they will be required to receive one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in order to be considered as fully vaccinated.