

Government conducts random nucleic acid tests on RAT positive cases declared starting March 8

The Government reminded members of the public on March 8 that the Government would conduct nucleic acid tests on citizens who declared a positive result on the Declaration System for individuals tested positive for COVID-19 using Rapid Antigen Test (Declaration System) of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health on a random basis starting March 8. The compulsory testing notice concerned has been gazetted (www.gld.gov.hk/egazette/pdf/20222691e/egn20222691324.pdf).

The CHP has appointed a testing contractor, which will be responsible for notifying persons who are selected to undergo nucleic acid tests on a random basis. The testing contractor will call the persons concerned, state clearly that it is appointed by the CHP, and confirm the addresses of the persons concerned in accordance with the record on the Declaration System. Thereafter, the testing contractor will arrange for door-to-door delivery of a nasal swab self-sampling kit by courier service on the same day or next.

To avoid face-to-face contact between the persons tested positive and the couriers, thus reducing the risk of virus transmission, the nasal swab self-sampling kit will only be placed outside the residence of the persons concerned. The courier will call the persons concerned prior to the delivery, informing them of the estimated time of delivery. The persons concerned will also be reminded that they should only collect the nasal swab self-sampling kit after the courier had departed, and leave the specimen bottle with the specimen collected outside their residence in 20 minutes for collection by the courier.

After receiving the nasal swab self-sampling kit, the persons concerned should –

1. collect their nasal specimen in accordance with the instructions;
2. conduct online registration or fill in the registration form in accordance with the instructions. The persons concerned should provide a phone number that can receive SMS notifications;
3. check if the specimen number on the registration form is consistent with that on the specimen bottle;
4. record the specimen number;
5. place the specimen bottle containing the specimen collected outside their residence in 20 minutes for collection by the courier for conducting nucleic acid test; and
6. keep the SMS notification that contains the result of the nucleic acid test upon receipt.

If persons subject to random nucleic acid tests have doubts towards the identity of the testing contractor, they can request the testing contractor to provide them with the reference number they received after registration at the Declaration System for verification. There will also be a logo of the CHP on the nasal swab self-sampling kit. Any enquiries on the above compulsory testing arrangements may be addressed to the CHP's hotlines at 2125 1111 / 2125 1122, which operate daily from 9am to 8pm.

At present, registration at the Declaration System is not limited to testings conducted with any particular brands of Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits. When in doubt about a positive result with RAT, members of the public may refer to the instructions of relevant RAT kits, or consider conducting another test, and report only after getting positive result again. The Government has procured a total of ten brands of RAT kits for free distribution to different targeted groups for self-testing. These kits, including self-test version and professional-use version, are recognised by relevant authorities of major markets (including Hong Kong, Mainland, the Europe and the United States). Preliminary evaluation of these kits were also conducted by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the CHP to confirm that they are effective in detecting the Omicron variant. For details, please refer to the thematic website (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/rat/eng/rat.html).

As market supply is tight, the Government also accepts suppliers to provide professional-use version of RAT kits on the relevant list during procurement. However, the suppliers must ensure that the kits meet the same testing standards (including performance in terms of specificity and sensitivity), and provide instructions for self-testing. For example, the YHLO Gline-2019-nCoV Ag procured and distributed by the Government is a self-test version that has the same testing standard as the professional-use version on the European Union Common list of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests.

"The Government urges all individuals who are subject to random nucleic acid testing as requested by the CHP to comply with the requirements, so as to facilitate the early identification of those infected effectively and isolation or treatment arrangements most suitable to them. The Government will seriously follow up the compliance with the compulsory testing notice by the persons concerned. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$10,000. The person will also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender will be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months," a Government spokesman said.

"Besides, members of the public should learn about the products' performance and limitations and take note of the expiry dates before making purchase of RAT kits. They should also purchase from reputable and reliable suppliers."