

Government continues to provide conditional free COVID-19 testing service for targeted groups

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) announced today (February 28) that the free COVID-19 testing service will continue to be provided for eligible persons of targeted groups at community testing centres (CTCs).

In view of the recent dire epidemic situation of Hong Kong and the higher infection risks exposed to the general community, the Government continues to conduct large-scale COVID-19 testing for groups of different risks in order to cut off transmission chains as quickly as possible. The regular compulsory testing of all targeted group persons, whether they have completed a vaccination course or not, must be done by using combined nasal and throat swabs collected by professionals. The arrangement is applicable to all full-time and part-time staff of relevant industries.

As the demand for testing services keeps on growing due to the upsurge of epidemic which has put immense pressure on the work in testing specimens collected for nucleic acid tests, the Government has revised the compulsory testing strategy under the risk-based principle starting from February 25. The frequency of compulsory testing for practitioners in high-risk and high-exposure groups (including staff of quarantine centres / hotels / facilities and designated transport, airport staff (Orange Zone and Green Zone), staff of container terminals and shipping services, cold store practitioners) has been revised to once every seven days for those who are fully vaccinated, and remains once every day for those not fully vaccinated. The Government will also distribute rapid antigen test (RAT) kits to relevant practitioners through the trades, such that they may perform more frequent tests in a testing cycle.

Separately, the Government has issued a compulsory testing notice on February 27 to require practitioners of Sheung Shui and Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouses to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 using specimens taken through combined nasal and throat swabs every two days and also using RAT kits once every day starting from February 28, so as to safeguard the health of the practitioners and the public.

Persons of targeted groups eligible for receiving free COVID-19 testing at CTCs are mainly those who are vaccinated or those who are unfit for vaccination because of health reasons. They must present valid medical certificates/vaccination records/documents of identity proof (see Notes) for receiving free tests. This requirement is applicable to all targeted groups. In other words, persons of targeted groups will need to pay for the regular testing service if they do not fall under the category of being unfit for vaccination because of health reasons. The specific requirements for eligible persons of various targeted groups (including testing frequency, specimen

requirement, conditions for receiving free test) are set out in the Annex.

Moreover, the CTCs also continue to provide free voluntary testing service for staff members of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes who are fully vaccinated (can receive a free test every seven days on a voluntary basis) and personnel working in markets and licensed hawkers (can receive a free test every 28 days on a voluntary basis).

In the light of the epidemic development in Hong Kong, the Government has implemented tightened social distancing measures for catering businesses and scheduled premises operating under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). Staff of relevant premises may refer to the [latest announcements](#) for the current operation conditions. Persons of targeted groups who still have the need to undergo testing have to make bookings online (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en) before receiving the free testing service at CTCs. Those who have no appointment or do not meet the eligibility/conditions will need to pay for the testing service at a cost of \$240. The free testing arrangement will be available until the end of March.

The Government regularly reviews the coverage and frequency of targeted group testing and if such testing should be publicly funded based on the latest epidemic risk assessment. A spokesman for the FHB said that the provision of free tests for targeted groups involves the use of public resources. Given that the Government must uphold the principle of effective use of resources, public money should only be used to subsidise individual eligible persons for taking nucleic acid tests in very exceptional situations.

The spokesman reiterated that the two COVID-19 vaccines currently recognised in Hong Kong are safe and effective, giving protection to the vaccinated persons and those around them. The vaccines have been received by billions of people worldwide and getting vaccination is the best way to fight the virus. Except for those with contraindications, most people are fit for vaccination. The Government calls on the public to treasure the vaccine supply in Hong Kong and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Notes:

(i) Persons who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of health reasons are required to present a relevant medical certificate;

(ii) persons who are vaccinated (i.e. have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, or received the second dose but have not yet passed 14 days, or completed a vaccination course of two doses) should present a relevant vaccination record (such as by downloading their electronic vaccination records or saving the printouts of their vaccination records to their mobile phones, or bringing along the printouts or copies of their vaccination records); and

(iii) certain groups should also present card/letter/document proof issued by relevant organisations for verification of identity.