

Government enhances testing arrangements for asymptomatic inbound travellers

The Government announced today (April 20) that starting from April 22, all asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) will be mandated to wait for test results at a designated location after collecting their deep throat saliva samples for conducting testing for COVID-19 at the Department of Health (DH)'s Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) at AsiaWorld-Expo under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599). Depending on the arrival time of flights and taking into consideration factors including infection control and crowd control as well as testing time, the DH will arrange those asymptomatic inbound travellers who need to wait for test results overnight to be temporarily accommodated in the DH Holding Centre for Test Result (HCTR) set up in the Regal Oriental Hotel.

A Government spokesman said, "Safeguarding the health of Hong Kong people and maintaining a robust healthcare system are the prime concern of the Government. Over the past two weeks, among the confirmed cases of COVID-19 recorded locally, nearly 80 per cent were imported cases or their close contacts. As such, blocking the virus from being imported to Hong Kong from overseas and preventing the imported cases from spreading locally are the keys to the Government's anti-epidemic work currently.

"After the implementation of the new testing arrangement, passengers arriving by flights in early mornings and later mornings will stay at the TSCC to wait for test results after collecting their deep throat saliva samples there. They will receive the test results on the same day. As the test results for passengers arriving in afternoons or at nights will not be available on the same day, they will be taken to the DH HCTR in the Regal Oriental Hotel by coaches arranged by the DH to wait for their test results."

The DH will issue quarantine orders to all passengers arriving at the HKIA in accordance with the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E). The relevant government department will also arrange electronic wristbands for them. According to quarantine orders, those staying at the DH HCTR shall not leave their hotel rooms nor move around in the hotel. Leaving designated rooms will be regarded as a breach of the quarantine order and constitutes a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum imprisonment for six months and fine of \$25,000.

The DH HCTR is equipped with basic security services to ensure the above persons are safe and cannot leave without permission. The hotel will provide basic catering services during the accommodation period. In general, the

relevant passengers will only stay in the hotel for one night and will be arranged to leave in an orderly manner on the next day when their test results are available. If their test results are negative, they will be allowed to leave the hotel and go home or to a designated place immediately to continue completion of the 14-day compulsory quarantine. Confirmed cases and their close contacts will respectively be arranged for admission to hospital and sent to designated quarantine centres by ambulance and vehicles arranged by the Government direct. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct thorough cleansings and disinfections at hotel rooms where confirmed cases stayed.

"All passengers waiting for test results at the hotel are asymptomatic when leaving the TSCC. Before the passengers tested negative, all inbound travellers will be arranged to take Government coaches to check in to the hotel directly. Thus, this arrangement would not introduce additional risk to the local community regarding where the hotel is situated", the Government spokesman added.

"In fact, since all passengers arriving at the HKIA are mandated to undergo compulsory quarantine in accordance with the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E), a number of hotels in Hong Kong have taken the initiatives to provide a 14-day package of accommodation to these persons for quarantine purposes. The risks of these passengers waiting for test results in the DH HCTR would not be higher than those under 14-day compulsory quarantine in other hotels."

The Government spokesman thanked all frontline healthcare professionals and colleagues for proactively engaging in the anti-epidemic work including at border control points to safeguard the health of Hong Kong people. Given the situation of the COVID-19 infection around the globe is still dire, the spokesman reminded members of the public to cancel all travel outside Hong Kong. The spokesman appealed to the Hong Kong community to stay united and fight the virus together.