

Government extends period of operation under "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice in Block 21, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po

The Government yesterday (February 18) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" effective from 7pm yesterday, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Sham Shui Po (i.e. Block 21, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po, see Annex) were required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing were required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" had undergone testing and the test results were mostly ascertained. The Government today (February 19) decided to extend the period of operation and aims at finishing the exercise in the late afternoon tomorrow (February 20). The operation may be extended depending on test results. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises and undergo two tests under designated arrangement (including the one conducted yesterday), until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained, and upon the agreement of the Secretary for Food and Health having regard to all the circumstances and the public interest of Hong Kong.

A Government spokesman said, "Recently, sewage discharged from Block 21, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po, was tested positive for COVID-19 and 150 preliminarily tested positive cases as well as 4 indeterminate cases have been identified under the 'restriction-testing declaration' operation conducted yesterday, which is worrying. In view of the significant risk of infection at Block 21, Shek Kip Mei Estate, we consider it necessary to undertake determined action by extending the 'restriction-testing declaration' operation made earlier under Cap. 599J to February 20 to prevent the virus from further spreading."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and requested persons subject to testing to undergo testing as designated on February 18 and February 19. Arrangements have been made for persons subject to testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to testing must stay at their place of residence according to the instructions of government officers to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility. As a mutant strain is

involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience for the public. We sincerely appeal for the co-operation of residents of Block 21, Shek Kip Mei Estate (including those who are at work and not currently at the premises) to return to their household and to comply with the testing arrangement. In addition, any person who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from February 5 to February 18, 2022, even if they were not present in the 'restricted area' at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before February 20, 2022. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially."

In order to maintain public and emergency services within the "restricted area", the Government and relevant working staff (such as healthcare officers and other officers of the Hospital Authority, testing service providers engaged by the Government and cleaning service providers) are allowed to enter and leave the "restricted area" on condition that personal information and contact details are given as well as certain infection control instructions are followed (including undergoing testing before leaving the "restricted area" without the need to wait for the test results). In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees.

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship for individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow those persons to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. Such persons must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and must leave their personal information for contact purposes.

The Housing Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2129 8029) for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and the "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$10,000. The person would 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 compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

