

Government extends period of operations under "restriction-testing declarations" and compulsory testing notices at Mei King House and Mei Chi House in Mei Tin Estate, Sha Tin

The Government yesterday (February 6) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 8pm and 8.30pm respectively yesterday, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted areas" in Sha Tin (i.e. Mei King House excluding the car park thereat, in Mei Tin Estate, Sha Tin, see Annex 1; and Mei Chi House excluding Mei Tin Estate Management Office on G/F, see Annex 2) were required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. The Government today (February 7) decided to extend the period of operations for Mei King House and Mei Chi House in the "restricted areas" and aims at finishing the exercise at about 10am tomorrow (February 8). Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises and undergo two tests under the designated arrangement (including the one conducted yesterday under the declarations), until all such persons identified in the "restricted areas" 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 Mei King House and Mei Chi House in Mei Tin Estate tested positive for COVID-19. A total of 10 and 12 preliminarily tested positive cases have been identified under the 'restriction-testing declaration' operations conducted in Mei King House and Mei Chi House respectively yesterday, which is worrying. In view of the significant risk of infection at Mei King House and Mei Chi House, we consider it necessary to undertake determined action by extending the 'restriction-testing declaration' operations made earlier under Cap. 599J till tomorrow to prevent the virus from further spreading."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted areas" and requested persons subject to testing to undergo testing as designated yesterday and today. 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 until all test results are ascertained 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 Mei King House and Mei Chi House (including those who are at work and not currently at the premises) to return to their household and to comply with the testing arrangement. Those who have visited Mei King House or Mei Chi House in the past two weeks for more than two hours should undergo testing on or before February 8, 2022, in accordance with the compulsory testing notices issued earlier. The Government will make a public announcement when the declarations expire officially."

In order to maintain public and emergency services within the "restricted areas", 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 areas" 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 areas" without the need to wait for the test results). In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declarations, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted areas" will cause unreasonable hardship for individuals who are not residents in the areas when the declarations take effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow those persons to leave the areas 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 declarations 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 \$5,000. 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.