

Government further tightens testing and isolation arrangement for crew members of aircraft and other exempted persons

The Government today (November 21) announced that testing and isolation arrangement for air crew members and other exempted persons who are exempted from quarantine requirement upon arriving Hong Kong will be tightened with effect from tomorrow (November 22).

A Government spokesman pointed out that in view of the development and severity of the global epidemic situation, the Government announced its plan on November 14 to tighten the epidemic control measures on all inbound travellers comprehensively based on the prevention and risk assessment. In addition to the tightening of the testing and isolation arrangement for consular and diplomatic officers as announced on November 17, the Government will, starting from tomorrow (November 22), further tighten the testing and isolation arrangement for air crew members and other exempted persons. With effect from tomorrow, air crew and other exempted persons who are exempted from compulsory quarantine arrangement under 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) arriving at Hong Kong at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) must subject to compliance with certain conditions, with details as follows:

All air crew members who have visited very high risk places (i.e. the specified very high-risk places gazetted under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap.599H)) during the 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong:

- All air crew members must possess a negative result of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test done at an ISO15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight to Hong Kong for duty (except local based air crew members and freight crew members);
- All air crew members must take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the Department of Health's (DH) Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) and wait for the results there or any other location as designated by DH upon arrival at HKIA;
- All non-local based air crew members, including freight crew members, must self-isolate at the hotel room arranged by the airline until departure from Hong Kong on their next duty flight upon availability of their test results;

- All local based air crew members must take point-to-point transfer and self-isolate until their next duty flight at the hotel room arranged by the airline for the duration of their stay when laying over at the very high risk place;
- Respective airlines must arrange point-to-point transportation for their air crew members between the airport (or holding location) and their accommodation. The use of public transport is prohibited; and
- All air crew members must collect and return their deep throat saliva sample at Day-12 upon their arrival in accordance with the instructions for SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test again if their duration of stay is more than 12 days.

Air crew members who have not visited very high risk places during the 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong:

- Non-local based air crew members who possess a negative result of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test done at an ISO15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight to Hong Kong are required to take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the DH's TSCC before leaving HKIA for self-isolation at the hotel room arranged by the airline until departure from Hong Kong on their next duty flight upon availability of the test results. Otherwise, they have to wait for the results at the TSCC or any other location as designated by DH;
- Local based air crew members must take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the DH's TSCC upon arrival at HKIA and subject to self-isolation at their accommodation until their test results are available;
- Respective airlines must arrange point-to-point transportation for their air crew members between the airport (or holding location) and their accommodation whilst in Hong Kong. The use of public transport is prohibited; and
- All air crew members must collect and return their deep throat saliva sample at Day-12 upon their arrival in accordance with the instructions for SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test again if their duration of stay is more than 12 days.

Other exempted persons (all exempted persons other than air crew and sea crew) who have visited very high risk places during the 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong:

- They must possess a negative result of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test done at an ISO15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight to Hong Kong;
- They must take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the DH's TSCC and wait for the results there or any other location as designated by DH upon arrival at HKIA;
- Specimen bottles will be distributed to the exempted persons upon

arrival. They must collect and return their deep throat saliva sample at Day-12 upon their arrival in accordance with the instructions for SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test again;

- Except Consul Generals or representatives in Hong Kong and government officials at equivalent/higher level, all other officers must be subject to self-isolation for 14 days at an accommodation arranged by respective organisations; and
- Respective organisations must arrange point-to-point transportation for the exempted persons. The use of public transport is prohibited.

Other exempted persons (all exempted persons other than air crew and sea crew) who have not visited very high risk places during the 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong:

- If they possess a negative result of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test done at an ISO15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight to Hong Kong, they are required to take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the DH's TSCC before leaving HKIA;
- If they do not possess a negative result of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test done at an ISO15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight to Hong Kong, they must take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the DH's TSCC and wait for the results there or any other location as designated by DH upon arrival at HKIA;
- Specimen bottles will be distributed to the exempted persons upon arrival. They must collect and return their deep throat saliva sample at Day-12 upon their arrival in accordance with the instructions for SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test again; and
- Respective organisations must arrange point-to-point transportation for the exempted persons. The use of public transport is prohibited.

Currently, crew change arrangement for passenger vessels and goods vessels without cargo operation in Hong Kong has been suspended. As for those with cargo operation, the Government has requested shipping companies to arrange all crew members of goods vessels to undergo nucleic acid tests at the point of departure within 48 hours and possess a negative result before embarking to travel to Hong Kong. They will also be required to conduct another test at the TSCC again upon arrival in Hong Kong and may only leave for their vessels upon availability of results. If the above conditions are not met, the crew member will not be granted exemption and will be denied entry into Hong Kong. The shipping agents must ensure that the crew members would go on-board the vessel immediately and directly upon arrival in Hong Kong and should not stay in public places. Point-to-point transfers to and from the vessel for the sea crew members must be arranged. For details, please refer to the press release issued on July 26 by the Government.

The spokesman added that the above measures aim to further tighten the

exemption conditions following the previous round of tightening measures targeting at exempted persons as announced by the Government in mid-July, taking into risk assessment of the epidemic situation. The spokesman emphasised that the exemption arrangement was essential for maintaining the necessary operation of society and the economy, and for ensuring an uninterrupted supply of all daily necessities to the public. According to the latest daily average number of exempted persons arriving at Hong Kong at HKIA, air crew members accounts for 93 per cent which represents the largest group amongst all. Sea crew members arriving in Hong Kong for crew change currently make up around 5 per cent of exempted persons arriving from HKIA. The rest of the 2 per cent represents other exempted persons, such as officers of Consulates General and other government officials.

The spokesman said, "Upon the introduction of the tightened measures, all exempted persons having visited very high risk places must be subject to 'test-and-hold' arrangement. In addition, the scope of activity of the exempted person in Hong Kong is limited to the purpose as designated in the exemption, and they may only take point-to-point transportation. The use of public transport is prohibited. Exempted persons must also avoid unnecessary social contact during the period they are exempted from quarantine. These measures are introduced with a view to minimising the chance of transmission of virus from imported cases into the community."

The spokesman added, "Based on risk-level assessment by the Centre for Health Protection, the Government has been adjusting its anti-epidemic measures under the 'suppress and lift' strategy. The Government will stay vigilant and adopt necessary mechanism in guarding against the importation of cases and curbing the transmission of diseases on the one hand, whilst ensuring as far as possible the essential operation of our city on the other."