

Government further tightens testing and isolation arrangements for exempted persons

The Government today (February 5) announced that the testing and isolation arrangements for exempted persons, including air crew members, sea crew members of goods vessels entering Hong Kong for cargo operations and other exempted persons, will be tightened with effect from February 20 (Saturday).

The Government spokesman reiterated that it is considered necessary to further tighten the epidemic control measures on all inbound travellers comprehensively based on the latest prevention risk assessment in view of the development and severity of the global epidemic situation. With effect from February 20, all persons exempted from compulsory quarantine in accordance with the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E), including air crew members, sea crew members of goods vessels entering Hong Kong for cargo operations and other exempted persons, must be subject to certain conditions as detailed at Annex 1. The key tightening measures are summarised as follows:

Air crew members

- All air crew members must be subject to "test-and-hold" arrangement (i.e. undergo testing and wait for the result at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) or designated location)
- All air crew members who have stayed in any places outside China during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong (but have not stayed in Group A specified places under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) (hereinafter "Group A specified places")) must self-isolate at the airport hotel (i.e. Headland Hotel or Hong Kong SkyCity Marriott Hotel) arranged by airlines until their next duty flight after undergoing testing
- If the aforementioned air crew members are local based crew who wish to leave the airport area, they must self-isolate at designated quarantine hotel for 14 days before entering the local community and be subject to testing on the 12th day following their arrival. They must also be subject to seven-day medical surveillance afterwards, with testing on the 15th and 19th or 20th day following their arrival, before operating again. Meanwhile, freight crew who have laid over in Anchorage, Alaska, of the United States of America, who are subject to closed-loop management in segregation from the local community (see Note) during the layover, will be exempted and they will not be subject to self-isolation at designated quarantine hotel. They will still be subject to 21-day

medical surveillance

Signing-off sea crew members for crew change of goods vessels (for goods vessels that enter Hong Kong for cargo operations only)

- For goods vessels which have called at the ports of any places outside China during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong (but have not stayed in Group A specified places), those signing-off sea crew for the purpose of crew change 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 within 72 hours prior to the vessel's scheduled time of arrival at Hong Kong; or the shipping companies/agents should arrange the signing-off sea crew to take a SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test by one of the recognised testing institutions in Hong Kong, and these crew members will need to stay on board until their negative results are available
- If the aforementioned goods vessels signing-off sea crew members are Hong Kong residents and will stay in Hong Kong after signing off, in addition to complying with the above conditions, they must use the point-to-point transportation to travel to designated quarantine hotels from designated pick-up points, and undergo 21-day compulsory quarantine as with other inbound travelers

Other exempted persons

- All other exempted persons must be subject to "test-and-hold" arrangement (i.e. undergo testing and wait for the result at HKIA or designated location) and undergo repeated testing during their stay in Hong Kong
- Except Consul Generals or representatives in Hong Kong and government officials at equivalent/higher level, all other government officials carrying out governmental duties who have stayed in any places outside China (but have not stayed in Group A specified places) during 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong must be subject to self-isolation for 21 days at an accommodation arranged by respective organisations. They must also be subject to repeated testing during the self-isolation period

As for exempted persons who have stayed in Group A specified places, the isolation arrangement tightened by the Government in December last year and on January 23 this year will carry on. All exempted persons (including air crew members) having stayed in Group A specified places in the past 21 days must be subject to self-isolation at designated quarantine hotels for 21 days upon arrival in Hong Kong. They must also be subject to "test-and-hold" arrangement and undergo testing on the 12th and 19th or 20th day upon arrival in Hong Kong. Currently, Group A specified places include Brazil, Ireland, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

In addition, to further mitigate exempted persons' contact with the local community during the exemption period, the Government has set up a designated quarantine channel for air crew members at the HKIA on January 10.

After undergoing testing and immigration procedures, air crew members will use the designated channel to arrive at the designated pick-up point to travel to their accommodation (or designated location to wait for the test result) by point-to-point transportation. The Government has started preparing for the setting up of another designated channel for other exempted persons with a view to minimising the chance of transmission of the virus from imported cases into the community.

Other boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements applicable to ordinary persons who have stayed in places outside China are still in force. To facilitate the public's understanding of the relevant requirements, the Government has categorised the relevant specified places into three groups according to the relevant risk-based boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements. The groups of specified places and their relevant requirements are set out at Annex 2.

The spokesman said the global pandemic situation remains severe. The number of new cases had recently reached a record high of over five million cases in a week in early January, while the number of deaths had also reached a record of nearly 97,000 cases in a week in mid-January. Following a series of tightening measures for exempted persons announced in July and November last year, the Government has further tightened the exemption conditions based on risk assessment to prevent the importation of cases and plug all loopholes so as to achieve the goal of "sparing no effort in achieving 'zero infection' ". The above measures aim to restrict all exempted persons from unnecessary social contact with a view to minimising the chance of transmission of the virus from imported cases into the community, while maintaining the necessary operation of society and the economy and ensuring an uninterrupted supply of all daily necessities to the public.

The spokesman emphasised, "Based on risk-level assessment by the Centre for Health Protection, the Government has been considering all relevant factors comprehensively to review and adjust the exemption arrangement for air crew members, sea crew members and other exempted persons. The Government will continue to closely monitor the development of the global and local epidemic situation, including the extent and pattern of the spread of the disease in a certain place, and will frequently review the epidemic prevention and control requirements for persons (including exempted persons) returning to Hong Kong from different parts of the world, and adjust them as needed so as to adopt necessary mechanism in guarding against the importation of cases on the one hand, whilst ensuring as far as possible the essential operation of our city on the other."

The spokesman added, "The Government understands the impact on airlines' and shipping companies' operations, and that on air crew and sea crew members to be brought about by the new arrangements. Having said that, we would appeal to the industry's understanding of the need to tighten the relevant exemption conditions, and call for the industry to join our concerted efforts to fight the virus. We will adjust the relevant arrangements in accordance with the development of the epidemic without prejudice to safeguard public health so as to maintain Hong Kong's status as an international aviation and

maritime hub."

Note: During their stay in Anchorage, Alaska, of the United States of America, air crew members can only travel between the airport and dedicated hotels by point-to-point transportation arranged by the airline. Airlines are required to arrange a specific floor/room for its crew members in the dedicated hotel and provide pre-check-in and check-out arrangements. During their stay in Anchorage, air crew members are not allowed to leave the room until they return to the airport for next cargo duty flight to Hong Kong. Air crew members shall not contact with local residents during their stay in Anchorage and airlines shall arrange designated group of air crew members to operate cargo flights between Hong Kong and Anchorage if practicable.