

Government invokes place-specific flight suspension mechanism for UK and suspends passenger flights from there

The Government announced today (June 28) the invocation of the place-specific flight suspension mechanism for the United Kingdom (UK). From 0.00am on July 1 (Hong Kong time), all passenger flights from the UK will be prohibited from landing in Hong Kong. The UK will also at the same time be specified as an extremely high-risk Group A1 specified place to restrict persons who have stayed in that place for more than two hours from boarding passenger flights for Hong Kong, so as to stop persons from the relevant place from travelling to Hong Kong via transit.

Under the place-specific flight suspension mechanism, if among all passenger flights from the same place, regardless of the airline, a total of five or more passengers were confirmed positive by arrival tests for COVID-19 with the N501Y mutant strain or relevant virus mutation within a seven-day period, or a total of 10 or more passengers were confirmed positive by any tests (including tests conducted during quarantine) with the N501Y mutant strain or relevant virus mutation within a seven-day period, the Government will invoke the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit all passenger flights from that place from landing in Hong Kong, and will specify that relevant place as an extremely high-risk Group A1 specified place under Cap. 599H to restrict persons who have stayed in that place for more than two hours from boarding passenger flights for Hong Kong, so as to stop persons from the relevant place from travelling to Hong Kong via transit.

In response to the severe worsening of the epidemic situation in the UK at the end of last year, Hong Kong specified the UK as an extremely high-risk place in December last year, and restricted people who had stayed in the UK from travelling to Hong Kong. Subsequently, the UK's local epidemic situation had greatly improved after the UK adopted a series of anti-epidemic measures and large-scale vaccinations. Taking into account the easing of the epidemic situation in the UK earlier, the Government gradually relaxed the restrictions in April and May on people who had stayed in the UK, including allowing Hong Kong residents to return to Hong Kong via designated flights in April, lowering the specification of the UK to a very high-risk Group A2 specified place from May 7 onwards, and further lowering the UK's specification to a high-risk Group B specified place from June 4 onwards.

However, in view of the recent rebound of the epidemic situation in the UK and the widespread Delta variant virus strain there, coupled with a number of cases with L452R mutant virus strains detected by tests from people arriving from the UK at the "test-and-hold" arrangements upon arrival or during quarantine in Hong Kong, the Government announced on June 24 the upgrading of the specification of the UK to a Group A2 specified place from

June 28 onwards, having closely monitored the epidemic developments there, the prevalence of mutant virus strains and the case importation risks that may be posed to Hong Kong. Nevertheless, a number of cases imported from the UK involving variant virus strains have persistently been detected in the past few days. As the number of the relevant imported cases has reached the threshold mentioned above, the Government will on July 1 invoke the place-specific flight suspension for the UK, and specify the UK as a Group A1 specified place.

Considering that the epidemic situation is still unstable in existing extremely high-risk places, i.e. Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and South Africa, the existing restrictions on the aforementioned places under Cap. 599H will continue.

The Government will gazette the relevant updated specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to effect the above measures on July 1.

"The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation of various places, the prevalence of new virus variants, vaccination progress, and changes in the volume of cross-boundary passenger traffic, and will adjust the boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements for persons arriving at Hong Kong from relevant places as the situation warrants," a Government spokesman said.

Details on the grouping of specified places and their respective boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements can be found at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/inbound-travel.html.