

Government maintains boarding restrictions for places with severe epidemic situation and compulsory quarantine arrangements

The Government announced today (January 7) that in view of the developments of the global COVID-19 epidemic situation, it is necessary to maintain the measure under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to restrict persons who have stayed in the United Kingdom (UK) or South Africa from boarding flights for Hong Kong, as well as the tightened 21-day compulsory quarantine requirement under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C), the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) and Cap. 599H for persons arriving in Hong Kong who have stayed in places outside China.

Due to the emergence of different new virus variants in the UK and South Africa which may be much more transmissible according to experts' preliminary assessment, and in view of their already prevalent spread in those places, as a precautionary measure, the Government had gazetted the relevant specification at the end of December last year, that any person who has stayed in the UK or South Africa for more than two hours on the day of boarding or during the 21 days before that day are not allowed to board for Hong Kong.

At the same time, with reference to advice from experts that the incubation period for a very small proportion of persons could be longer than 14 days, coupled with the rapid and drastic change of the global epidemic situation, the Government had at the end of last year amended Cap. 599C, Cap. 599E and Cap. 599H to provide for the flexibility in lengthening the compulsory quarantine period for persons arriving in Hong Kong from a certain place (to a maximum of 28 days), and the period for a certain place from which persons who arrive in Hong Kong have stayed before the arrival for determining the quarantine and boarding requirements (to a maximum of 28 days). The Government had also required that from December 25, 2020, all persons arriving in Hong Kong (either via the airport or land boundary control points) who have stayed in places outside China on the day of arrival in Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day have to undergo compulsory quarantine for 21 days in designated quarantine hotels.

The epidemic situation worldwide remains severe, with cases of the more transmissible new virus variant detected in an increasing number of places. The situation in the UK, where the new virus variant was first discovered, has further deteriorated in the past two weeks. England is under lockdown again until mid-February, and the outlook in the short term is

grim. So far, there have also been 15 imported cases of the new virus variant detected in Hong Kong, 13 of which were imported by persons who arrived from the UK, and another new virus variant had been found in two imported cases from South Africa. After reviewing the latest epidemic developments globally and in the relevant places, the Government finds it necessary to maintain the measure to restrict persons who have stayed in the UK and South Africa from boarding for Hong Kong, and the 21-day compulsory quarantine requirement for persons arriving in Hong Kong who have stayed in places outside China.

A Government spokesman said, "The Government recognises that the above requirement is very stringent and may inevitably affect the return journey of a number of Hong Kong residents in the UK or South Africa. However, the Government has the responsibility to guard against the importation of COVID-19 cases, and the new virus variant in particular, in order to protect the well-being of Hong Kong residents. Indeed, it is thanks to the joint efforts of everyone in Hong Kong that the local epidemic situation has only just begun to stabilise somewhat. We simply cannot afford to relax the relevant restrictions at this juncture, lest the anti-epidemic efforts of the entire community go down the drain."

The Government has all along been closely monitoring the developments 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 returning to Hong Kong from different parts of the world, and adjust them as needed.

The spokesman said, "The Government will review every two weeks the measure restricting persons who have stayed in the UK or South Africa from boarding for Hong Kong, and the compulsory quarantine requirement for persons who have stayed in places outside China, and will announce whether adjustments are required."