

Government phases out deep throat saliva as recognised specimen for compulsory testing

The Government announced today (September 7) that further steps will be taken to replace deep throat saliva specimen by combined nasal and throat swab samples collected by professionals (professional swab sampling) as recognised compulsory testing method except for certain circumstances, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of COVID-19 testing arrangements.

"Risk-based, frequent and accurate virus testing has all along been a key to Hong Kong's success in the fight against the epidemic. Currently, 18 community testing centres (CTCs) provide professional swab sampling for all walks of life in a convenient and reliable manner. In view of this, the Government will no longer accept deep throat saliva as specimen for compulsory testing except for certain circumstances. The new arrangement will enhance the reliability of compulsory testing, making it more effective in the course of securing the protective barrier of Hong Kong," a Government spokesman said.

Starting from tomorrow (September 8), following persons must attend to any of the mobile specimen collection stations, CTCs or recognised local medical testing institutions to undergo professional swab sampling in fulfilling the requirements for compulsory testing. Young children may continue to undergo the test using stool specimen:

- Persons subject to compulsory testing in accordance with a compulsory testing notice related to a confirmed case (e.g. persons who had been present at a premises visited by a confirmed case)
- Persons subject to compulsory testing in relation to an outbreak of upper respiratory tract infection and/or influenza-like illness in a school

Persons who arrive in Hong Kong from tomorrow onwards must undergo testing with professional swab sampling at a community testing centre or a recognised local medical testing institution, so as to comply with the compulsory testing requirement:

- Arrivals in Hong Kong who have completed compulsory quarantine or isolation in a designated quarantine hotel (DQH) or at home but still need to undergo compulsory testing
- Arrivals in Hong Kong under the Return2hk Scheme
- Arrivals in Hong Kong under the Come2hk Scheme soon to be launched

Meanwhile, for persons subject to compulsory testing in accordance with specific social distancing measures (such as staff members and passengers of

"Cruise-to-nowhere" itineraries, and performers who do not wear masks in performance venues), as well as specific trades (such as sea crew members departing Hong Kong due to crew change arrangement and vaccinated staff members of the airport and DQHs), the Government will no longer accept their deep throat saliva specimens for compulsory testing. Details will be announced in due course.

The public can undergo free testing at the CTCs if the test is related to confirmed cases, or arriving from places outside Hong Kong, or belong to designated sectors (such as vaccinated staff of the airport and DQHs). The CTCs provide booking and walk-in services. Members of the public only need to provide simple personal information on the 24-hour booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en) for selection of a suitable testing centre and a time slot for testing. The testing centres will accord priority to serve individuals with advance bookings. As of 6pm today, there were around 27 000 booking places available for tomorrow at the CTCs, and around 88 per cent availability for booking places for the coming week. The Government will set up additional mobile specimen collection stations when necessary to provide free testing services for residents/workers subject to compulsory testing through professional swab sampling.

Compulsory testing using deep throat saliva specimen will continue to be conducted under certain circumstances, for example, testing provided by the medical practitioners for suspected symptomatic patients; testing for inbound travellers during home quarantine or isolation; confirmatory tests for inbound travellers staying at DQHs or quarantine facilities; and testing for persons who are incapable of receiving professional swab sampling due to health or age reasons. As per existing mechanism, the Government distributes sufficient deep throat saliva specimen collection packs to inbound travellers who are required to undergo home quarantine or isolation at boundary control points. Other inbound travellers (including persons arriving Hong Kong under Return2hk Scheme or Come2hk Scheme to be launched later) will not receive specimen collection packs.

Some members of the public still undergo testing on a voluntary basis. Taking into consideration that it can facilitate community surveillance and help achieve the objectives of "early identification, early isolation and early treatment", the Government will continue to distribute deep throat saliva specimen collection packs free-of-charge through various channels (including general outpatient clinics of the Hospital Authority, post offices and distribution points at MTR stations) while the supply of the specimen collection packs will be adjusted at appropriate juncture.