

# Government proactively implements compulsory testing and carries out enforcement operations in “restricted areas” to achieve goal of zero cases in districts

The Government has over the past two weeks in several districts exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make "restriction-testing declarations", under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted areas" were required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing, and carried out enforcement actions to verify that all people in the "restricted areas" had undergone compulsory testing. As of today (February 10), a total of 26 declarations and associated enforcement operations have been made and carried out since January 23.

The relevant declarations and enforcement operations covered various districts, including Yau Tsim Mong District, Eastern District, Kwun Tong District, Yuen Long District, Sham Shui Po District, Kowloon City District, Tuen Mun District and Sha Tin District. During the operations, over 24 000 people underwent testing in the specified "restricted areas" and 20 confirmed cases were found. The Government hopes to identify asymptomatic patients in the community as early as possible through relevant declarations and enforcement actions so as to cut the transmission chains in the community, ease residents' worries and fears, and regain residents' confidence within the community.

In order to ensure that people within each "restricted area" had acted in accordance with the requirement of relevant declarations and compulsory testing notices to undergo compulsory testing, the Government conducted enforcement operations immediately after the completion of compulsory testing exercises. In the enforcement operations over the past two or so weeks, 234 persons were found not having undergone compulsory testing. The Government issued compulsory testing orders and/or fixed penalties of \$5,000 to them. The Government hopes to raise awareness among members of the public on testing for the sake of themselves as well as that of the others, and appeals to citizens to comply with the requirement of the compulsory testing notice, or else they would have to bear legal consequences. The Government will continue to step up enforcement. Persons who violate a compulsory testing notice will be handled in a strict manner and the act will not be tolerated.

The Government is aware of the inconvenience caused to the public during the compulsory testing operations and enforcement actions. However, in order to identify and cut the transmission chains, thereby curbing the epidemic,

the Government appeals for the understanding of members of the public.

To minimise the impact caused to residents, the Government has improved the operation arrangements based on previous experience, such as downsizing the scale of each "restricted area" and compressing the testing time so that an operation can be started in the evening and completed by early morning, thereby minimising the impact on residents' activities in the daytime. The Government has also set up special queues for children, elderly persons and people in need to accord testing priority to them in order to shorten their waiting time. The Government has also arranged door-to-door services for elderly homes, people with impaired mobility and other people in need in a "restricted area" so as to facilitate their testing. Moreover, if staying in a "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to an individual who is not a resident in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his or her personal information for contact purposes.

When the declarations took effect, the Home Affairs Department not only provided simple food (e.g. bread, cake, cup noodles, canned food, corn and soy milk) for persons subject to compulsory testing, but also supplied them with anti-epidemic items including masks, bleach, detergent and hand sanitiser to help them fight against the virus. In addition, hotline services (including the dedicated hotline set up for ethnic minorities when necessary) were set up for persons subject to compulsory testing to make enquiries and seek assistance.

In the operations, nearly 12 000 man-time of civil servants, including those from disciplinary forces and clerical staff members, from over 40 government bureaux and departments were mobilised (see Annex). When necessary, ethnic minority staff members participated and assisted in communication with ethnic minority residents in a district. The Government thanks all participating government staff and the testing agencies for their hard work. The Government is also grateful to those within the "restricted areas" for their support and understanding, as well as owners' corporations for their assistance to ensure smooth implementation of compulsory testing.

The Government hopes to fight against the epidemic with the public, and to conduct testing for all persons within the specified "restricted areas" in a short period of time so as to achieve the goal of zero cases in the districts and so that members of the public can return to a normal life as soon as possible.