

Government responds to media enquiries on arrangement of COVID-19 tests by individual organisations or individuals

In response to media enquiries on charged COVID-19 tests offered by individual organisations or individuals in the community, a Government spokesman made the following responses and clarifications today (August 21).

The relevant tests are not arranged by relevant government departments, nor are they part of the Government's Universal Community Testing Programme (UCT Programme) or Targeted Group Testing Scheme. As the relevant testing services are not arranged by the Government, according to the "Code of Practice for Registered Medical Laboratory Technologists" promulgated by the Medical Laboratory Technologists Board, the COVID-19 nucleic acid test can only be carried out under the referral of a registered doctor or dentist, otherwise the medical laboratory technologist involved may be deemed to have contravened the Code of Practice. Further, the relevant organisations and individuals must ensure that the collection and handling of personal data complies with the requirements under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486).

According to the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A), medical practitioners who have reason to suspect the existence of a case of scheduled infectious disease (including COVID-19), shall notify the Director of Health immediately. Failure to comply will constitute an offence. Further, laboratories which conduct COVID-19 tests are required to provide specimen tested positive and relevant personal information to the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch under the Department of Health for confirmation, to ensure that the infected person could be isolated and receive appropriate treatment as soon as possible, and that epidemiological investigation could be conducted.

The spokesman said, "Members of the public who feel unwell should seek medical advice as soon as possible and conduct testing if directed by the doctor. Indeed, to encourage members of the public with symptoms to conduct virus tests as soon as possible, so as to achieve early testing and diagnosis, starting from July 27, individuals who perceive themselves to have higher risk of exposure and experience mild discomfort can collect or return relevant specimen bottles free-of-charge at 22 general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority (HA) during scheduled slots. The Government has also announced that the UCT Programme would commence on September 1 to provide a one-off free testing service for members of the public. The Government appeals to members of the public to participate in the UCT Programme with a view to fighting the epidemic together, and to contribute to the eradication and control of epidemic in Hong Kong, paving way for

relaxation of social distancing measures and return to normal life."

Members of the public who intend to receive COVID-19 tests are encouraged to make use of the services provided by HA as far as possible (details of relevant GOPCs are at Annex), and the UCT Programme to be introduced by the Government which is free-of-charge. The spokesman stressed that no personal information (including specimens and test results) will be transported outside Hong Kong, and that the workflow also does not involve the provision of any personal data to any organisations or persons outside Hong Kong.