

# Government strengthens restrictions to persons arriving at Hong Kong from United Kingdom

â€œIn view of the development of COVID-19 epidemic situation in the United Kingdom (UK), the Government announced on December 21 that it would tighten a number of infection control measures under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) applicable to persons arriving at Hong Kong from the UK. The relevant measures became effective from 0.00am on December 22 until further notice.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The transmissibility of the mutated virus spotted in the UK is very high, higher than that of the current virus by 70 per cent. Although there is no information showing that the relevant mutated virus has worsened the situation of infected individuals, the HKSAR Government attaches utmost importance to this new development."

Currently, persons who arrive at Hong Kong via the airport from specified high-risk places under Cap. 599H including the UK and are subject to compulsory quarantine need to present a negative result of a nucleic acid test for COVID-19 done within 72 hours of boarding the flight as well as room reservation in a designated quarantine hotel, and undergo the "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival in Hong Kong (i.e. undergo testing and wait for the test result at the airport or at a designated location). Only with the negative test result can the travellers take designated transportation to the designated quarantine hotel to undergo 14 days of compulsory quarantine. They are also required to undergo another test on day 12, so as to ascertain the negative test result before the end of the quarantine period.

The spokesman said, "In view of the recent development of the global pandemic situation, the Government exercised the power under Cap. 599J to publish a compulsory testing notice on December 18, which requires persons who arrive at Hong Kong from places outside China (including the UK) on or after December 2 to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test at the Community Testing Centres on the 19th or 20th day following their arrival at Hong Kong after completing the 14-day quarantine, in order to ensure that with compulsory testing, no case would slip through the net even under very exceptional cases where the incubation period of the virus is longer than the quarantine period."

"In view of the latest epidemic situation in the UK, taking into account expert advice, we consider it necessary to introduce stringent measures immediately as precautionary measures to prevent the mutated virus from importing from the UK and spreading in the community in Hong Kong."

Details of the measures are as below:

1. The requirements under Cap. 599H will be tightened so that all persons who have stayed in the UK for more than two hours in the past 14 days (including Hong Kong residents) will not be allowed to board for Hong Kong.
2. An updated compulsory testing notice will be made under Cap. 599J, which requires persons who have stayed in the UK, arrive at Hong Kong on or after December 2, 2020, and are placed under compulsory quarantine in Hong Kong (including the quarantine orders issued under the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) or Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C)), to stay at their place of residence, private premises or the place of quarantine specified on the quarantine order (place of stay) apart from undergoing testing at the Community Testing Centres on the 19th or 20th day following their arrival at Hong Kong. If the persons who arrive at Hong Kong from the UK and are subject to testing need to take public transport for the purpose of undergoing testing or for going to their place of stay, the persons can only travel direct by taking taxis and cannot disembark on the way. Any person who fails to comply with the above requirements commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified timeframe. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

The Government is also working on the legislative amendment in parallel, which will allow the compulsory quarantine period to last for more than 14 days when necessary, including lengthening the compulsory quarantine period for persons who arrive at Hong Kong from the UK to 21 days. Details will be announced after the endorsement by the Executive Council.

The spokesman said, "The Government will continue to monitor closely the situation, including the developments of the epidemic situation both globally and locally and changes in the volume of cross-boundary passenger traffic, and will not hesitate to adopt more resolute and severe measures as and when necessary."