

Government supplies free rapid antigen test kits to elderly

The Government announced today (April 13) that free COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits will be made available to elderly service recipients aged 60 or above during the period from April 19 (Tuesday) to May 31 (Tuesday) through the elderly district health services units under the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the Department of Health (DH), the elderly community care and support services units subsidised by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), and the district-based Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs) operating on a tripartite collaboration model involving the Hospital Authority (HA), non-government organisations (NGOs) and a local university. The arrangement aims to support and encourage the elderly to conduct testing on their own for early identification of infected persons and curbing of community transmission chains. The arrangement will be reviewed in due course.

A Government spokesman said, "To ensure that infected elderly people can receive appropriate and timely treatment, the Government will supply free RAT kits to the elderly so as to encourage them to undergo voluntary testing from time to time. In particular, individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions (e.g. those with symptoms such as fever and/or respiratory tract infection) or with higher infection risks (e.g. those who had contact with confirmed cases or symptomatic persons) should undergo testing as soon as possible, with a view to achieving the goal of 'early identification, early isolation and early treatment'."

From April 19 to May 31, eligible elderly service recipients of the following service units can collect free RAT kits via channels stated below:

1. Two District Health Centres (DHC) and 11 DHC Expresses under the Primary Healthcare Office of the FHB (for members or service users aged 60 or above);
2. 14 Elderly Health Centres under the DH (for members or services users aged 65 or above);
3. 213 District Elderly Community Centres/Neighbourhood Elderly Centres/Social Centre for the Elderly subsidised by the SWD (for members aged 60 or above);
4. 93 Day Care Centres/Units for the Elderly, 61 Integrated Home Care Services Teams, 31 Enhanced Home and Community Care Services Teams and 238 Recognised Service Providers of the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly subsidised by the SWD (for service users aged 60 or above); and
5. 18 district-based CMCTRs operating on a tripartite collaboration model involving the HA, NGOs and a local university (for patients attending medical appointment aged 60 or above or their family members/carers).

The elderly may refer to the demonstration video produced by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) under the DH via www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzFAUzTtmKk to learn about the way in using the RAT kit.

Persons tested positive through a RAT should take a photo of the test result and declare the result within 24 hours via the "Declaration System for individuals tested positive for COVID-19 using Rapid Antigen Test" (www.chp.gov.hk/ratp). If the elderly encounter difficulties in using the online platform, they can call the automated system at 1836 119 to register their identification document and telephone number. The CHP will contact the relevant person later to complete the report procedure. There is no need to declare negative test results.

The Government is also providing free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing service to all elderly people aged 70 or above at community testing centres (CTCs) and mobile specimen collection stations. No advance booking is needed for the elderly. For locations of the CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations, please browse www.communitytest.gov.hk.

The elderly may obtain anti-epidemic information and medical assistance through the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk), the 24-hour telephone "StayHomeSafe" hotline (1833 019) set up by the Home Affairs Department, as well as the support hotline (1836 115) run by the HA.

The spokesman said that the current epidemic situation of Hong Kong remains dire, and the elderly have higher infection risks and are more prone to serious illness or even death if infected. The COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and death from COVID-19. The Government strongly appeals to the elderly who are not yet vaccinated to receive vaccination as soon as possible as a way to safeguard their well-being and lower the infection risk.

The spokesman also reminded that the daily number of new COVID-19 positive cases is still at a high level, citizens should stay on guard by avoiding cross-family gatherings and strictly observing the social distancing measures.