

Government updates criteria for releasing confirmed COVID-19 patients from isolation

The Government announced today (October 26) that the criteria for releasing confirmed COVID-19 patients from isolation will be updated, and the discharge criteria for confirmed patients will be tightened. The relevant arrangements will come into effect from tomorrow (October 27).

A Government spokesman said, "As part of our proactive anti-epidemic strategy to maintain 'zero infection', patients who meet the discharge criteria will be subject to a 14-day isolation and health monitoring after being discharged from hospital. As patients who have recovered from infection recently may still carry the virus, the latest arrangement would further reduce the risk of such patients bringing the virus into the community to a minimum. It would also lower the risk of virus spreading in the community due to possible re-positive situation. The latest arrangement supersedes the one announced by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health on August 6, 2021."

The revised discharge criteria for confirmed patients are as follows:

- (a) For symptomatic patients:
 - (i) Afebrile for at least three days;
 - (ii) Significantly improved respiratory symptoms;
 - (iii) Significant improvement in lung infiltrates in chest imaging; and
 - (iv) Meeting the following laboratory criteria: With two clinical specimens of the same type (i.e. respiratory or stool) tested negative for nucleic acid of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) by reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) taken at least 24 hours apart (for patients ever with stool specimen(s) tested positive, they should have two negative stool specimens collected 24 hours apart before release from isolation); and 10 days have passed since the onset of illness
- (b) For patients who did not develop any COVID-19 compatible symptoms all along:
 - Meeting the following laboratory criteria: With two clinical specimens of the same type (i.e. respiratory or stool) tested negative for nucleic acid of SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR taken at least 24 hours apart (for patients ever with stool specimen(s) tested positive, they should have two negative stool specimens collected 24 hours apart before release from isolation); and 10 days have passed after the first positive RT-PCR for SARS-CoV-2.

Patients fulfilling the discharge criteria will immediately be arranged by point-to-point transfer to designated isolation facilities to undergo 14-day isolation and health monitoring through close-loop management arrangement to ensure that they do not bring the virus into the community. The Government has designated the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre

as isolation facility for the time being.

The Department of Health will extend the isolation orders of patients who meet the discharge criteria pursuant to the power under section 23 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A) until 14 days after discharge.