

Hong Kong International Airport to strengthen testing for staff

To enhance the implementation of the COVID-19 infection control strategy of "preventing the importation of cases and the spreading of the virus in the community", the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has appointed the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) to implement a series of testing schemes to strengthen protection of the health of the staff and users of the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). The schemes include a one-off compulsory test for airport staff, a voluntary regular testing scheme for specified frontline staff and a free voluntary testing scheme for all airport staff.

One-off compulsory test

The Secretary for Food and Health issued a compulsory testing notice today (February 2) pursuant to the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J), requiring persons employed during the period from February 4 to 25, 2021, by the Government, any statutory body, airport business partners or their contractors/subcontractors, or service providers engaged by the aforementioned entities under hire-of-service contracts, who have the Airport Area as mentioned in the Airport Authority Ordinance (Cap. 483) as their usual place of work or service, and who intend to continue to have the Airport Area as their usual place of work or service during the period of March 1 to 31, 2021, should undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19, according to the requirements and procedures specified in the notice.

During the period from February 4 to 25, 2021, the relevant persons shall have to visit any of the Dedicated Testing Centres set up by the AAHK in the Airport Area (information on the locations, opening dates and opening hours are set out in www.hongkongairport.com/iwov-resources/image/home/COVID19/Airport_Dedicated_Testing_Centres.jpg) or any of the Community Testing Centres set up by the Government (information on the locations, opening hours and online registration is at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/) and receive free testing services by providing a specimen collected by combined nasal and throat swabs. Tests for the staff of the Hospital Authority (HA) working in the Airport Area shall be carried out at any of the medical facilities under the HA. In addition, the relevant persons may opt for self-arranged testing provided by a laboratory recognised by the Department of Health at their own expense (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories_RTPCR.pdf) and receive the test as instructed by the relevant staff of the laboratory.

After taking the test, the relevant persons shall obtain and keep the test report or the relevant SMS or email notification containing the result

of the test for checking by the enforcement officers during the period from March 1 to 31, 2021.

Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be liable to be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. 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 estimates that close to 70 000 people will participate in this compulsory test. The AAHK will fully support the Government to implement anti-epidemic and testing measures, as well as to provide support in helping airport staff to comply with the Government's compulsory testing notice. The AAHK will issue a circular to inform the airport community of the details of the one-off compulsory test and will be in close liaison with the community to facilitate testing by airport staff as soon as possible. Please refer to the relevant announcement of the AAHK for details of the testing service at the HKIA.

Voluntary regular testing scheme for specified frontline staff

On the consideration that certain groups of airport staff, such as persons carrying out quarantine procedures at the airport, handling cold chain logistics and cleaning aircraft cabins, may have a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 from outside Hong Kong, the Government and the AAHK will, upon completion of the one-off compulsory testing scheme, roll out for such staff a voluntary regular testing scheme in March. Details of the testing scheme will be communicated to the relevant staff later. The Government estimates that about 2 000 people will participate in this voluntary regular testing scheme.

Free voluntary testing service for airport staff

The Government has been providing deep throat saliva specimen bottles at the airport since May 2020. This free, voluntary testing service will continue so that staff who present no symptoms and do not belong to any target group for the voluntary regular testing scheme can still submit test specimens, and testing will be available to meet public needs as far as possible. Up to 800 staff members may receive this voluntary testing service on every work day. Testing capacity can be adjusted according to the situation.

The Government urges the airport community to contribute their efforts to COVID-19 anti-epidemic and actively participate in the testing schemes to protect the health of the public and reduce the risk of community transmission.