

# Hospital Authority heightens vigilance towards mutant strains

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

In light of the latest global epidemic situation and the emergence of local cases with mutant strains, the Hospital Authority (HA) today (May 7) reminded hospital clusters to prepare for deploying adequate single isolation facilities to dovetail with the stepped-up patient isolation arrangement, while the regular staff testing arrangement will be further extended to reduce the risk of nosocomial transmission of COVID-19 to safeguard patients and staff.

"Single isolation will be arranged for all patients confirmed with COVID-19 infection upon their admission, with gene sequencing tests arranged immediately. Patients of imported cases will be kept in single isolation until they are discharged upon recovery, while patients of local cases will also be kept in single isolation until discharge, unless they test negative for mutant strains through gene sequencing tests," the HA spokesperson said.

In addition, the HA will arrange regular COVID-19 testing for around 65 000 front-line staff who have direct patient contact, starting from next week.

"Upon consultation with infection control experts and making reference to the regular testing arrangements of overseas and local healthcare institutions and other professions, the HA decided to extend the staff testing arrangement next week," the HA spokesperson said.

"The staff concerned will be provided with rapid antigen test kits for conducting self-testing regularly every week. Upon completion of a test, staff members can report their test results through a mobile app designated for HA staff, or save a photo record by themselves. Staff who have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine for more than 14 days can indicate their preference for participation in the regular testing exercise."

Since January 2021, the HA has introduced pilot COVID-19 regular testing for about 5 000 staff members caring for vulnerable patients and patients with end-stage illness. Rapid antigen testing was later introduced in mid-March. The testing and the reporting workflow have been smooth so far, while feedback from participating staff has been positive. No confirmed case has been identified during the period.

The HA spokesperson reiterated that regular testing and vaccination are types of stepped-up measures. Front-line staff still need to comply with infection control measures and wear appropriate personal protective equipment as stipulated in the guidelines when taking care of patients.

The HA thanks staff members for their co-operation in the testing arrangement and urges members of the public and staff to get vaccinated early so as to reduce their own risk of COVID-19 infection and to prevent the resurgence of a large-scale community outbreak.