

LCQ21: Provision of sick leave or allowance for persons undergoing compulsory quarantine

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 23):

Question:

Under the current quarantine arrangements, persons who were close contacts of persons confirmed to have contracted the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) are required to undergo compulsory quarantine for 14 or 21 days. Earlier on, the compulsory quarantine requirements were once extended to cover those who were not close contacts of, but residing in the same building as, those persons confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 with mutant strain. It is learnt that as "absence from work on account of being placed under compulsory quarantine" is not the reason provided for taking sick leave under the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57), quite a number of members of the grass roots were asked by their employers to take no pay leave for undergoing compulsory quarantine, and their livelihood was thus gravely affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of persons, since February last year, to whom the Department of Health issued documentary proof of having undergone compulsory quarantine, together with a breakdown by whether they were confirmed to have contracted COVID-19;

(2) among the persons confirmed while undergoing compulsory quarantine to have contracted COVID-19, of the number of those to whom the authorities issued sick leave certificates, since February last year; and

(3) whether it will, by drawing reference from the practice adopted by the Government for dealing with the employment issues arising from the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003, issue sick leave certificates through the Director of Health to all those employees who have undergone compulsory quarantine, thereby enabling them to take paid sick leave, or consider afresh the provision of a daily quarantine allowance for them?

Reply:

President,

Pursuant to the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap 599A), if a health officer has reason to believe that a person is a contact, the health officer may, by order in writing, place the person under quarantine until a health officer considers that the person is not infectious; or the

quarantine can be replaced by medical surveillance.

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) will adopt quarantine measures for close contacts based on the risk assessment of each local confirmed COVID-19 case, the prevailing COVID-19 epidemiology and the circumstances of each individual case. Furthermore, following further analysis of epidemiological data of patients, the risk of infection of their close contacts, and the testing results of the relevant compulsory testing orders and restriction-testing declarations, the CHP updated the quarantine arrangements of local confirmed COVID-19 cases with mutant strain on May 7, 2021.

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by Hon Luk Chung-hung is as follows:

(1) & (3) The DH will arrange for the persons concerned to undergo quarantine, medical surveillance and testing at designated quarantine centres. When they leave the quarantine centre upon completion of the quarantine period, the DH will issue them with a document, setting out the quarantine period and whether they were infected with COVID-19, as proof of their stay at the quarantine centre. Sick leave certificates will also be issued upon request.

As at June 22, 2021, more than 49 000 persons were put under quarantine in various quarantine centres, of whom over 2 500 were confirmed positive for COVID-19.

(2) According to records, during the period from September 8, 2020 to June 22, 2021, the DH issued more than 5 000 sick leave certificates to persons having undergone quarantine in quarantine centres. The DH does not keep statistics on the number of sick leave certificates issued between January 23, 2020 when the quarantine centres were put into operation and September 7, 2020.