

LCQ5: Compulsory testing

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (April 28):

Question:

The Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) has been implemented since November 15, 2020 to cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic. The Government may invoke the Regulation to issue compulsory testing notices (CTNs) requiring the relevant groups or persons to undergo compulsory COVID-19 testing by a specified deadline. Moreover, the Government may delineate "restricted areas" and make restriction-testing declarations (RTDs) requiring that all persons within the restricted areas stay in their premises and undergo compulsory COVID-19 testing in accordance with the Government's arrangement, and they may leave only after the test results have mostly been ascertained. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council, since November last year:

(1) of the number of CTNs issued by the Government, the total number of persons who underwent compulsory COVID-19 testing as required under CTNs and, among them, the number of those confirmed to have contracted COVID-19;

(2) of the number of law enforcement operations conducted by the Government to check whether the persons concerned had complied with the requirements of CTNs; the number of persons found during such operations to have breached the requirements, and the number of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued to them;

(3) of the number of restricted areas delineated by the Government, the number of persons within such areas who underwent the testing and, among them, the number of those confirmed to have contracted COVID-19; and

(4) of the number of law enforcement operations conducted by the Government to check whether the persons within the restricted areas had complied with the requirements of RTDs; the number of persons found during such operations to have breached the requirements, and the number of FPNs issued to them?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been adjusting its anti-epidemic strategies in view of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, among which, extensive testing with a view to achieving "early identification, early isolation and early treatment" helps identify asymptomatic infected persons, and cut the transmission chains in the community as far as possible. The Government will strive to achieve the target of "zero infection", so the public can resume

their normal life as early as possible.

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

(1) Since the implementation of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) (the Regulation) on November 15, 2020, the Government had conducted more than 2.87 million compulsory tests as at April 23, 2021, of which 4 318 samples or 0.15% were tested preliminarily positive.

On November 21, 2020, the Government exercised the power under the Regulation for the first time and issued a compulsory testing notice (CTN) requiring persons who fell within the specified category to undergo a nucleic acid test for COVID-19 within the specified period in compliance with the requirements and procedure set out in the CTN. During the period from November 21, 2020 to April 23, 2021, the Government issued a total of 197 CTNs in implementing the virus testing strategy of compulsory testing on a mandatory basis.

(2) For buildings or workplaces included in CTNs, the Government will conduct enforcement actions to check the test records of the persons subject to compulsory testing so as to ensure their compliance with the CTN requirements. During the period from December 24, 2020 to April 23, 2021, 30 such operations were conducted and more than 200 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) of \$5,000 were issued to those who had failed to comply with CTNs.

(3) To achieve the target of "zero cases" in districts, the Government has actively conducted a number of large-scale compulsory testing operations. The Government may make restriction-testing declarations (RTDs) and delineate restricted areas under the Regulation requiring all persons within the restricted areas to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the Government's arrangement, and they may leave only after the test results have mostly been ascertained. A total of 41 RTD operations were successfully completed in a number of districts between January 23 and April 23, 2021, during which about 37 000 persons were tested and 22 confirmed cases were found.

(4) In all of the above RTD operations (except the one on April 16), the Government conducted enforcement operations in the areas concerned upon completion of compulsory testing arrangement so as to ensure that those persons within the restricted areas had undergone compulsory testing in accordance with the restriction and testing requirements. During these enforcement operations, about 40 FPNs of \$5,000 were issued to those who had failed to comply with CTNs.

During the RTD operation conducted on April 16, a preliminary positive case with the test result involving the N501Y mutant strain was found in the building concerned. The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health considered it necessary to take prudent infection control measures. Hence, after all residents of the building within the restricted area had

undergone compulsory testing, those without symptoms were taken to quarantine centres for compulsory quarantine, so as to prevent the potential risk of spreading the N501Y mutant strain to the community.