

LCQ9: Isolation and quarantine arrangements amid the epidemic

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 25):

Question:

It has been reported that earlier on, a confirmed patient of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 who was suffering from various chronic diseases died while under isolation at a community isolation facility. Also, an 87-year-old person died while under quarantine at a designated quarantine hotel (DQH). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government currently requires confirmed patients to declare their significant past medical history and medication history, and whether it provides relevant lists to facilitate such patients to submit sufficient information for the pre-triage assessment; if so, whether it will review if such lists are comprehensive enough for ensuring that confirmed patients can be triaged and sent to suitable isolation or medical facilities;

(2) whether it will review the triage procedure for confirmed patients, and request healthcare personnel of the Hospital Authority to take part in the pre-triage initial assessment for confirmed patients;

(3) whether it will (i) review the considerations for determining if it is appropriate for a confirmed patient to be isolated alone, and (ii) triage confirmed patients who are suffering from relatively serious chronic diseases and with unstable conditions as well as those aged above 75 for sending to hospitals for isolation and treatment;

(4) whether it will review the medical support to be provided to persons with chronic diseases when they are under isolation or quarantine;

(5) whether it knows if DQHs have arranged dedicated staff to provide assistance to persons under quarantine at their hotels when such persons have urgent needs such as medical treatment, and whether the Government has issued guidelines to the hotels in this regard; and

(6) given that the aforesaid two incidents were only discovered when the family members had been unable to contact the victims and requested the staff's assistance, whether the Government will consider requiring persons under isolation or quarantine to regularly contact the staff concerned using instant messaging applications (e.g. reporting body temperature), so as to let the staff know their physical conditions?

Reply:

President,

In light of the fifth wave of COVID-19 epidemic, the Government will, depending on the health risks, care needs and transmission risks in the households of infected persons, make arrangements for them according to the multi-tiered triage and treatment strategy for suitable treatment and isolation. Generally, asymptomatic persons who do not require medical support but have to be isolated at a place other than their household due to their care needs or household environment will be admitted to the Penny's Bay Community Isolation Facility (CIF) to reduce transmission risks. In addition, the Government has implemented the Designated Quarantine Hotel (DQH) Scheme since December 22, 2020, requiring all arrivals from specified places to undergo compulsory quarantine at DQHs as a measure to further prevent the importation of COVID-19 cases.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam is as follows:

(1) The DH requires individuals tested positive through the nucleic acid tests or rapid antigen tests to submit their personal particulars and basic epidemiological data through its online platforms (www.chp.gov.hk/cdpi and www.chp.gov.hk/ratp/). The websites provide a questionnaire for relevant infected persons to conduct risk assessment themselves to see if their household environment is suitable for isolation, or if they have to be admitted to CIFs based on relevant risk factors, including the suitability of household environment in terms of physical and health conditions of relevant individuals, such as self-care abilities, whether they need to be taken care of by others, have chronic illnesses, are pregnant.

(2) to (4) After reviewing the operational experience, the HA has further enhanced the arrangements for admission to CIFs from May 4, 2022 onwards. Chronically ill patients in more serious or unstable conditions and elderly persons aged above 70 without accompanying family members will be arranged for admission to the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre (NLTH HKICC) or other hospital facilities for isolation, so as to be provided with more appropriate monitoring and care.

Healthcare personnel deployed to the CIF by the HA will conduct initial assessment for infected persons arranged to undergo isolation at the Penny's Bay CIF. To facilitate monitoring, infected persons with chronic illness but in stable condition will be admitted to units in special blocks installed with emergency alarm system and in close proximity to the medical post. Moreover, outreach medical teams will visit these infected persons regularly every day to provide them with proper care and assistance. Infected persons assessed by healthcare personnel as having high risks (e.g. with complicated medical conditions or with recent and serious health problems) will be transferred to the NLTH HKICC or other hospital facilities for closer monitoring and treatment.

As infected persons aged above 70 are prone to complications or sudden deterioration of conditions, they are also categorised as having high risks and considered unsuitable for isolation in individual units on their own. Those without accompanying carers will be transferred to the NLTH HKICC or other hospital facilities for enhanced monitoring. Those in relatively stable conditions, if accompanied by carers, will be accommodated in units specially designed for the elderly at the CIF, in which barrier-free facilities and emergency alarm system are provided. Besides, outreach medical teams will visit them regularly and maintain close contact with their family members to monitor their conditions closely.

(5) and (6) For persons under quarantine at DQHs, the DH briefs inbound travellers on relevant quarantine arrangements through a dedicated website (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/designated-hotel-returnees.html) and by distributing a leaflet on Points to Note for Designated Hotel Quarantine for Inbound Travellers, reminding them that for any urgent needs, medical or otherwise, they may contact DQH staff or call the DH's 24-hour hotline centre for persons under quarantine. In case of emergency, they may dial 999 to seek assistance from the Police.

The DH will provide training to DQH staff and request them to assist the persons under quarantine, including:

- (a) exercising common sense when considering whether the special requests of persons under quarantine are reasonable, and attending to their needs. DQHs should provide suitable assistance and fulfill the medical requests of persons under quarantine whenever possible, such as delivering medicine to them;
- (b) ensuring sufficient manpower to handle emergencies. In case of emergency, they should dial 999 to seek assistance from the Police;
- (c) paying close attention to the condition of persons under quarantine regularly. If they do not dispose of garbage or collect meals regularly, DQH staff should call them to check on their conditions. If they cannot be reached after several attempts, under an emergency or when their safety is of concern, DQH staff may open the doors of their rooms after wearing suitable personal protective equipment to assist as appropriate even without prior Government approval, and report to relevant Government departments afterwards; and
- (d) assisting in contacting the persons under quarantine if their family members request so to understand the situation.

Moreover, the DH provides support to DQHs and answers medical-related or other enquiries via a 24-hour help desk hotline.

Meanwhile, to ensure that persons with special needs (such as minors or the elderly) can receive the required care when admitted to DQHs, if the person under quarantine requires an accompanying carer, the accompanying carer can apply to the DH before the person's arrival to Hong Kong or after receiving his or her Quarantine Order upon arrival. The accompanying carer and the person under quarantine will undergo quarantine in the same DQH room until the end of the quarantine period.

A 24-hour telephone hotline manned by staff of the Civil Aid Service is available at the Penny's Bay CIF to provide information and enquiry services for persons under quarantine. Medical support hotline services are also available at the community isolation hotels. Those under isolation who are in need or feel unwell may contact the staff on duty via the hotline for immediate assistance or medical support. If necessary, the staff on duty will notify the healthcare personnel on-site immediately for rendering medical support. Security staff and housekeeping assistants at the facilities will also conduct regular inspections of the isolation units. If any person is in need of assistance or should any unexpected incidents occur, relevant staff will be informed immediately for taking appropriate actions.