

Public hospitals gear up for challenging epidemic

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

In light of the challenging COVID-19 epidemic lately, the Hospital Authority (HA) Central Command Committee today (December 31) examined the readiness of various anti-epidemic facilities, manpower and medical supplies, alongside the planning of the contingency response for public hospitals to cope with a possible rapid surge in confirmed cases.

The HA also reminded frontline healthcare staff of Accident and Emergency Departments and general out-patient clinics to be vigilant and pay particular attention to patients' travel history, occupation, contact with any confirmed patient or compulsory testing requirements. Appropriate infection control arrangements and personal protective equipment should be applied accordingly.

"Around 180 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre (HKICC) and the HA Infectious Disease Centre located at Princess Margaret Hospital. As single isolation is required both for confirmed patients with a mutant strain and preliminarily confirmed patients pending test results, there is growing pressure in patient admission at the HKICC. The HA decided to reopen the standby community treatment facility at AsiaWorld-Expo on Sunday (January 2, 2022) to provide 500 more beds, including 20 negative pressure cubicles," an HA spokesperson said.

"If the epidemic deteriorates further, the HA could deploy, in phases, the 1 200 isolation beds and 600 tier-2 isolation beds in public hospitals for the admission of elderly, paediatric and severe patients in particular."

The spokesperson added that the HA has a stock of personal protective equipment to last more than six months. "In preparation for the treatment of severe patients, there are around 1 500 ventilators in total in various public hospitals. Specific training courses on ventilator application have also been organised for healthcare staff not working in Intensive Care Units to enhance the flexibility in manpower deployment," the spokesperson said.

The HA laboratories can handle rapid tests of up to 15 000 patient specimens each day. Preliminary analysis of mutant strains can also be conducted to support clinical decisions on single or cohort isolation arrangements of confirmed patients.

Lastly, the HA spokesperson appealed to the public to get vaccinated as early as possible. Members of the public who have not yet been vaccinated should grasp the opportunity to get vaccinated soon while vaccinated people should take a booster dose at an appropriate time to minimise the risk of

infection or developing severe symptoms if infected.