

# Quarantine and isolation arrangement involving children

Concerning the quarantine and isolation arrangement for families involving young children and with members identified as close contacts and/or confirmed cases, a Government spokesman explained today (March 16) the policy and arrangement on these areas.

"Hong Kong has comprehensive and robust measures to combat COVID-19, which include quarantine and isolation where necessary, and these measures achieve to stabilise the recent wave of epidemic in safeguarding the well-being of our community as a whole. Yet, we also wish to emphasise that for cases where children are involved, each and every decision has been made in the interests of the children and their families," the spokesman said.

To ensure proper care of COVID-19 patients and to prevent further transmission, all confirmed COVID-19 patients are admitted to public hospitals and treatment facilities managed by the Hospital Authority (HA) for isolation and treatment. During some specific operations, preliminary positive cases would also be admitted to hospitals or medical facilities for early isolation and treatment. On the other hand, close contacts of confirmed cases will be subject to 14-day quarantine at Government quarantine centres.

## Close contact and quarantine arrangement

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) will perform epidemiological investigation and risk assessment to identify close contacts for reported cases. Close contacts in general are defined as those who have stayed or lived with the patient, or had face-to-face contact with a case without wearing a mask.

Under certain circumstances, such as at an outbreak situation where two or more confirmed cases are found within the same premises, or within an environment with higher risk (e.g. playing sports, doing exercise or staying in the same classroom or school hall for an extended period of time), contacts even if wearing a mask could also be considered as close contacts.

The Government operates six quarantine centres (QCs) for close contacts including four at government facilities, namely: the Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre, the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre; and two at hotels, namely Silka Tsuen Wan and Dorsett Kwun Tong.

Medical posts operating around the clock are set up at the four QCs in the government facilities, whereas mobile medical teams stand by at the two hotels.

Sending close contacts to QCs is considered on a case-by-case basis

taking into account a number of factors, including whether there are special needs (e.g. minors, pregnant women), medical needs, distance between close contacts' residence and the QC, etc. Normally those requiring medical attention would be sent to one of the four QCs at government facilities where their health condition can be better monitored and supported in case of emergency.

For any child under age 18 to be quarantined in QCs, the Department of Health (DH) upon request would generally allow one of the parents to accompany their children to the QCs to take care of them. In such cases, the parent and the child would remain in the same room until the quarantine period ends.

If a parent tests positive and to be hospitalised, a caretaker arranged by the parents (who can be relatives, parents' adult friends or domestic helpers) could be allowed to accompany the quarantined child.

For parents classified as close contacts but would like to stay with their children with special needs who are not close contacts, the parent could make request to DH to bring their children to the QC. The children will need to stay with the parents for the whole quarantine period. The parents need to sign an undertaking that they fully understand the risk of infection.

To cater for specific needs of children (including babies), the Social Welfare Department provides a wide range of items in the QCs available to minors, including cots, blankets, bumpers, clothes, cutlery, toiletries, diapers for children and babies, baby food and snacks, as well as colouring pencils and coloring books for children. Milk warmers, disinfectors for milk bottles and refrigerators for parents are also provided upon request. The DH and Civil Aid Service colleagues are doing their best to accommodate the needs for quarantined children, and make the QC environment as child-friendly as possible.

### Isolation and treatment

Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world where confirmed COVID-19 patients, regardless of carrying symptoms or not, are admitted to public hospitals and treatment facilities for isolation and treatment. The HA has continued to enhance its capacity through activating Tier-2 isolation beds, and operating the Community Treatment Facility at AsiaWorld-Expo and North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre.

The HA fully understands the special needs of children, and has been striking a balance between infection control measures and the needs of patients. If parents or family members of a paediatric COVID-19 patient are also diagnosed with COVID-19, public hospitals will consider placing the patients in the same Airborne Infection Isolation Room, subject to assessment of the patients' clinical condition. In cases where the parents test negative, public hospitals will also accommodate their request to accompany the paediatric patient, subject to the agreement of the CHP of DH and the availability of isolation capacities.

The hospital will explain the risk of contracting the infection to the parents. Essential infection control precautions and personal protective equipment will be provided. Due to infection control consideration, the parents will be required to undergo an additional quarantine period under CHP after the paediatric patient is discharged.

In the scenario where both parents are confirmed with COVID-19 and there is no other better arrangement for providing care for their children, public hospitals will, upon the agreement of CHP, provide suitable arrangement to facilitate proper parental care.

"Controlling the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic and protecting the health of the whole of all Hong Kong population living and working in the city, including members of their families, is the prime concern of the Government," the spokesman said.

"If anyone in quarantine or isolation has any questions, requests or suggestions we have in place established procedures to ensure this can happen and that people's needs can be met as far as practicably and safely possible."