

Quarantine arrangements in response to novel coronavirus infection (with photo)

In accordance with the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance (2020), the Government has formulated a comprehensive prevention and control strategy as well as mandatory quarantine measures, including setting up of quarantine centres and implementation of mandatory home quarantine measures, with a view to strengthening prevention and reducing the risk of spreading of the novel coronavirus.

The Food and Health Bureau, the Department of Health (DH) and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer held a press conference today (February 3) to explain the relevant arrangements.

According to the prevailing measures, patients suspected to be infected by the novel coronavirus will be admitted to hospitals for isolation and treatment. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH requires close contacts with the confirmed cases who do not have symptoms to be put under mandatory quarantine.

Whether being arranged to stay at quarantine centres or to be put under mandatory home quarantine, they are not confirmed or suspected cases. They are close contacts of confirmed cases or those have been to Hubei Province in the past 14 days and without any symptoms.

In spite of this, the arrangement of quarantine centres and home quarantine can effectively monitor health condition of those under quarantine. They can be transferred to hospitals for isolation and treatment as soon as possible if they develop the relevant symptoms. This arrangement can help prevent spreading of infectious diseases.

A spokesman for the Government stressed that in order to prevent the transmission of the disease in the community with a view to achieving the highest effectiveness of the mandatory quarantine measures, the co-operation of the whole community is indispensable. The arrangement not only protects those under quarantine, but to safeguard everybody's health. Thus, it is hoped that the whole community can fight the disease together.

Quarantine centres

Currently, the occupancy of three quarantine centres, namely the MacLehose Holiday Village, the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village and Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Pak Tam Chung Holiday Camp, is close to their maximum capacity. The Government is actively preparing to convert the Jao Tsung-I Academy into the fourth quarantine centre.

The Government will increase quarantine facilities as soon as possible and is looking for existing sites suitable for quarantine purposes, including construction of about 300 mobile units of modular housing at the three quarantine centres in use currently and in Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre. The first batch of around 100 mobile units could be used in mid-March the earliest.

When searching for the sites, the Government has thoroughly considered whether the facilities meet the requirements for a quarantine centre including location, overall facilities, environment and the possible impact to the residents. It will also be ensured that operation of all the quarantine centres meets stringent requirements.

The Government will first use the remaining units of the existing quarantine centres for quarantine of close contacts of confirmed cases without symptoms. Those people who have been to the Hubei Province in the past 14 days and do not have symptoms will be put under mandatory home quarantine. The existing quarantine centres will also reserve units for those in need of home quarantine but not suitable to stay at home.

Arrangement of mandatory home quarantine

Only people without symptoms will be arranged to conduct mandatory quarantine at home. In addition to providing relevant health information to people under quarantine, the Government also offers guidance on cleaning and sterilisation for property management companies. A list of buildings where people under quarantine reside is available at DH's dedicated website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html).

According to the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation, people under quarantine must remain staying at home at all times. Any person concerned who leave home without permission may commit a criminal offence, and is subject to a maximum penalty of \$5,000 and imprisonment of six months on conviction. Strict enforcement action will be taken.

To ensure that they stay at home for quarantine, the Government will use electronic wristbands to monitor the location of those people under quarantine. No personal data will be involved.

During the quarantine period, CHP staff will visit and contact via phone the people under quarantine and provide them with health advice. They are reminded to maintain good personal and environmental hygiene including covering the toilet seat before flushing as well as regularly pouring water into each drain outlet (U-traps), etc. They are required to check body temperature twice a day and record physical condition.

The CHP will provide people under quarantine with a dedicated 24-hour hotline. They should contact healthcare personnel via the hotline if they have fever or develop other symptoms. They will be sent to the hospital immediately after assessment.

During the quarantine period, various government departments will regularly render necessary assistance to those under quarantine.

A dedicated webpage (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html) has been set up by the CHP to provide relevant information and health advice on Severe Respiratory Disease associated with a Novel Infectious Agent. Information of the latest notifications received from the Mainland and overseas will be updated to the CHP website (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/statistics_of_the_cases_novel_coronavirus_infection_en.pdf) daily at 9am and 6pm to help the public grasp information on the affected countries/areas.

