

Staff members of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes required to undergo compulsory testing

In accordance with Section 10(1) of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J), the Secretary for Food and Health yesterday (November 30) issued a compulsory testing notice, requiring persons who are employed by and will be on duty at residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) (Note), residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs), nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of residential care homes or will provide services to residents or users through hire-of-service contracts with residential care homes and the aforementioned units between December 15 and 21 (including full-time, part-time and relief staff) to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 between December 1 and 14 according to the requirements and procedures specified in the notice. The sample must not be taken by the person himself/herself. The above measure aims to safeguard the health of residents and staff members of these premises.

The staff of the aforementioned institutions must choose to undergo the polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 as below:

- (1) To receive free specimen collection services using combined nasal and throat swabs in any of the Community Testing Centres set up by the Government (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/); or
- (2) To self-arrange testing by using the same methodology provided by private laboratories recognised by the Department of Health (DH) at their own expenses (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories_RTPCR.pdf).

Any person who fails to comply with the testing notice commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$2,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified timeframe. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

A spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said that most of the residents of RCHEs are frail elderly persons whose life will be under serious threat if they are infected with COVID-19 virus. Besides, there had been outbreaks in local RCHDs and some of their residents are also elderly persons. Institution operators should remind their staff members to make advance bookings for testing services through the booking system of the Community Testing Centres (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en) as early as possible. The concerned staff members should properly keep the SMS notification as proof of their test results. Those who choose to undergo self-arranged tests at their own expenses by private laboratories should also keep their test

result reports.

Institution operators are required to keep records of the information concerning their staff receiving specified tests and the results within the timeframe specified by the Government. Institution operators also have to cooperate with the Checking Officers (Compulsory Testing) of the SWD to implement the regulations within the residential care homes.

The spokesperson said that the above measures may need to be maintained for some time. The SWD and the DH would issue letters to institutions to inform them of the relevant arrangements and requirements.

Note: The RCHEs in Mui Wo and Cheung Chau and a day service unit attached to one of them are excluded. Alternative arrangements will be made for them.