

SWD announces latest arrangements in relation to compulsory testing for staff members of RCHs, one-off special allowance for staff members of RCHs receiving COVID-19 vaccinations and latest visiting arrangements for RCHs

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) today (June 18) announced a number of measures in relation to the compulsory testing for staff members of residential care homes (RCHs), staff members of RCHs receiving COVID-19 vaccinations, and visiting arrangements for RCHs. They are as follows:

- (i) to cease the disbursement of the ex-gratia allowance to staff members of RCHs who undergone compulsory testing (ex-gratia allowance) on or after June 25, 2021;
- (ii) to discontinue from September 1, 2021 onwards the payment of any testing fees incurred in the self-arranged testing by operators of RCHes and RCHDs;
- (iii) to provide from today a one-off special allowance for staff members of RCHs who receive COVID-19 vaccinations ("Special Allowance for Vaccinations"); and
- (iv) to implement from today an updated restricted visiting arrangement for RCHs.

Since December 1, 2020, staff members of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHes), residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs), nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of RCHes or RCHDs are required to undergo regular testing in accordance with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notices issued under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J). Owing to the limited testing venues at that time, inconvenience was caused to a number of staff members who needed to spend additional time or make special arrangements to undergo testing. In view of this, the SWD has been disbursing a monthly ex-gratia allowance of \$200 to each staff member of RCHs who has participated in compulsory testing through their RCHs since the first round of testing. To facilitate their participation in the testing, the Government has gradually provided various testing means since the second round of compulsory testing. Since mid-December 2020, RCHs have been allowed to self-arrange testing services provided by a recognised laboratory and submit applications to the SWD for reimbursement of the testing fees.

The Government formally launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme on February 26, 2021 and has been urging staff members of RCHs to get vaccinated as soon as possible. In April 2021, the Government further allow them to

receive vaccination at the RCHs which join the Outreach Vaccination Arrangement for Residential Care Homes with a view to building an immune barrier for both staff members and residents.

Latest compulsory testing arrangements and Special Allowance for Vaccinations

The Government considers that it is necessary to encourage staff members of RCHs to receive COVID-19 vaccinations as soon as possible and has decided to implement the following measures in relation to the upcoming compulsory testing arrangements for staff members of RCHs:

- Ceasing the disbursement of ex-gratia allowance: The SWD will cease disbursing ex-gratia allowance to staff members of RCHs who undergo compulsory testing on or after June 25, 2021 (i.e. from the 18th round of compulsory testing for staff members of RCHs).

- Discontinuing the payment of any testing fees incurred in the self-arranged testing by operators of RCHEs and RCHDs: starting from September 1, 2021, the SWD will discontinue the payment of any testing fees incurred in the self-arranged testing by operators of RCHEs and RCHDs. Staff members can still choose to undergo testing in Community Testing Centres, mobile specimen collection stations (if any) or Temporary Testing Centres (if any).

- Disbursement of special allowance for vaccinations: The SWD will focus its resources on disbursing the one-off allowance of \$800 through RCHs to staff members of RCHs who meet the following three requirements:

(i) Staff members who have undergone testing according to the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notices under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) during the period from June 25 to August 31, 2021 inclusive. (Staff members who have completed COVID-19 vaccinations and been exempted from the testing are also regarded as meeting this requirement); and

(ii) Those who have completed COVID-19 vaccination on or before August 31, 2021 and provided the vaccination records; and

(iii) On the day the staff members complete COVID-19 vaccination or thereafter, they should be employed by and on duty at RCHEs, RCHDs or day service units attached to the RCHs, or provide services to residents or users at the aforementioned RCHs or units through hire-of-service contracts, during the period as stipulated in the above requirement in (i).

Those who meet the above requirements can only apply for the Special Allowance for Vaccinations through one RCH or unit where they are employed

(or provide services through hire-of-service contracts).

Latest visiting arrangements

Moreover, in the light of the latest epidemic situation, under the premise of continuously minimising social contacts and carrying out infection-preventive measures, the following restricted visiting arrangement for RCHes and RCHDs (except for official visitors) is implemented from today:

(i) If both visitors and residents concerned have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course and present their vaccination records, the visitors are not required to present negative COVID-19 test result before the visit.

(ii) If visitors have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course and present their vaccination records, while residents concerned have not completed a COVID-19 vaccination course, the visitors are still required to present a negative COVID-19 test (see Note 1) result obtained within 72 hours before the scheduled visit, or a negative COVID-19 rapid antigen test (see Note 2) result within 24 hours before the visit (see Note 3).

(iii) Visitors who have not been vaccinated or have not completed a vaccination course are required to present a negative COVID-19 test (see Note 1) result obtained within 72 hours before the visit.

Visitors who have not been vaccinated, have not completed a vaccination course or do not possess a negative COVID-19 test result obtained within 72 hours before the visit (except official visitors) but need to pay urgent visits to institutions for compassionate reasons must provide a negative COVID-19 test (see Note 1) result within two days after the visit.

To safeguard the health of residents, staff members and visitors, institutions must take prudent and effective measures to reduce infection risks and should continue to enhance their communication with the residents and their relatives on the visiting arrangement and relevant measures.

Note 1: It refers to the polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19.

Note 2: According to information provided by the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), the designated COVID-19 rapid antigen test products are: (1) INDICAID COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test (Phase Scientific International Limited); (2) SARS-CoV-2 Rapid Antigen Test Nasal (Roche Diagnostics (Hong Kong) Limited); and (3) Panbio COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test Device (Abbott Laboratories Limited). The SWD will update the designated product list based on the FHB's recommendation and make announcements through the SWD's webpage, if needed.

Note 3: The visitors have to bring along a photo of the person being tested (namely the visitor) with the negative result and the date and time of the test shown in it, together with the product insert and packing of the rapid antigen test kit used, to give to the staff members of RCHs for checking.