

Third round of compulsory testing for staff members of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes to commence shortly

The Government today (December 24) announced that the third round of compulsory testing for staff members of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) and nursing homes will commence shortly.

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 (December 23) issued a compulsory testing notice, requiring persons who are employed by and will be on duty at RCHEs, RCHDs, nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of residential care homes during the period January 8 to 17, 2021, or who will provide services to residents or users through hire-of-service contracts with residential care homes and the aforementioned units during that period (including full-time, part-time and relief staff), to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 during the period from December 29, 2020 to January 7, 2021, according to the requirements and procedures specified in the notice (specified tests). The samples must be collected by using combined nasal and throat swabs and must not be taken by the person to be tested.

The staff of the aforementioned institutions must choose to undergo the specified tests as below:

- (1) To receive free specimen collection services in any of the Community Testing Centres (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/), Temporary Testing Centres (if any) (see the list at www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_supportser/sub_ttc/), or mobile specimen collection stations (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);
- (2) To have specimen collection by a healthcare professional or trained personnel as arranged by institution operators for testing at private laboratories listed on "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories RTPCR.pdf); or
- (3) To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories listed on "COVID-19 Thematic Website" 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 subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000. He/she 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 the SWD and the Department of Health would issue letters to institutions to inform them of the relevant arrangements and requirements. Institution operators should remind their staff members to properly keep the SMS notification of their test results or their test result reports.

Institution operators are required to keep records of their staff having received specified tests and the results within the timeframe specified by the Government. Institution operators also have to co-operate with Checking Officers (Compulsory Testing) of the SWD who are enforcing the regulations at residential care homes.