

Tightened testing and quarantine arrangement for sea and air crew comes into effect

â€‹The Government today (July 29) reminded that the tightened testing and quarantine arrangement for sea crew and air crew members announced earlier (July 26) has come into effect to strengthen the prevention of imported cases under the current severe epidemic situation.

With effect from 0:00 am on July 29, crew change arrangement for all passenger vessels and goods vessels without cargo operation will be suspended. All air crew and incoming sea crew members of goods vessels coming to Hong Kong for cargo operation arriving at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) must obtain a negative result of nucleic acid test for COVID-19 conducted at a recognised laboratory within 48 hours prior to boarding. They must also submit a deep throat saliva specimen at the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) of the Department of Health (DH) upon arrival to Hong Kong for testing purpose. All incoming sea crew members and those air crew members who do not possess negative test results must wait at the TSCC or other designated location until their test results are confirmed negative. Airlines and shipping companies/agents must arrange point-to-point transfer for the air crew and sea crew members and the use of public transportation which will serve the general public at the same time is prohibited. Regarding community isolation arrangement, incoming and outgoing sea crew members must only travel between the vessels and HKIA and should not go into the community. As for air crew members, they must self-isolate at their hotel rooms or at home in accordance with the requirements.

Persons who are found to be in breach of the above exemption conditions would risk their exemption status being revoked and will be subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days. They are also subject to a maximum fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment for six months. In addition, airlines and shipping companies/agents should implement all necessary measures to ensure the compliance with the above requirements. Relevant airlines and shipping companies/agents will be held liable for any contravention of the above requirements. For sea crew members, shipping companies/agents which fail to comply with the above conditions will be denied crew change arrangement in Hong Kong for one month. As for air crew, the Government would follow up cases of violation of public health requirements seriously, which includes reviewing the operation arrangements of those airlines in Hong Kong.

A government spokesman reiterated that the existing exemption arrangement is essential to maintain the necessary operation of the society and the economy, and to ensure an uninterrupted supply of all daily necessities to the public, which includes imports of food products, groceries as well as other commodities from land, air and sea routes. The Government has been closely monitoring the risk and pressure on public health brought about by imported cases, and adopts relevant coping measures in a resolute

manner. The purpose of the press release issued by the Government on July 19, entitled "Government clarifies on necessity of quarantine exemption arrangement", was based on opinions which suggested that the quarantine exemption arrangement had brought about loopholes in the quarantine regime and that the whole exemption arrangement should be ceased entirely. As a result, the Government found it necessary to clarify categorically on the necessity of the exemption mechanism on Hong Kong's operation in order to diffuse misunderstanding on this matter. The Government had no intention to negate the professional opinion of the experts on the source of the outbreak. Unfortunately, the clarification had been interpreted as the Government and experts holding different views. In fact, the Government has all along respected the views of the experts and has been formulating its anti-epidemic measures under the "suppress and lift" strategy and "rapid response" approach which has been based on public health considerations and scientific evidence. Going forward, the Government will continue to maintain close communication with experts and examine relevant local and international empirical studies. It will continue to cooperate with local research teams in the academia, including provision of funding under the Health and Medical Research Fund to local research teams to conduct COVID-19-related researches so as to provide more evidence-based support for the anti-epidemic work.

The testing and quarantine arrangement imposed by the Government on incoming passengers was made on the basis of public health risk assessment and has been adjusting rapidly in response to the epidemic situation and experts' views. With the emergence of the third wave of local outbreak and the rising number of imported cases brought about by Hong Kong residents returning from high risk countries, air crew and sea crew since early July, the Government has been actively and progressively tightening up the testing and quarantine measures imposed on exempted persons based on latest research findings and opinions made by experts publicly. The measures imposed on exempted persons, including air and sea crew, were made with a view to reducing the number of imported cases on the one hand, and having regard to the actual operational need of relevant industries on the other.

"We are at a critical juncture in combating the acute situation of epidemic. Although the testing and quarantine arrangements will have an impact on the aviation and maritime industry, we consider it necessary to adopt stringent measures at this time. The Government will closely monitor the impacts brought about by the relevant measures and suitably adjust our strategy in a bid to minimise the inconvenience to people's livelihood," said the spokesman.