

Universal Community Testing Programme to be launched on September 1

To identify as early as possible asymptomatic COVID-19 patients in the community and achieve the target of early identification, early isolation and early treatment to cut the community transmission chain, a spokesman for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government said today (August 21) that the Government will launch the Universal Community Testing Programme (UCTP) on September 1 to provide a one-off free testing service for members of the public. The UCTP is scheduled to run for seven days. Subject to actual progress, it may be extended for no more than seven days.

"Except for children under 6 years old and people not suitable for the test, all holders of valid Hong Kong identity cards or birth certificates who are asymptomatic can participate in the programme on a voluntary basis," the spokesman said.

"The Government will set up community testing centres in all districts across the territory. Appropriate infection control and social distancing measures will be put in place at the centres in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Health. Members of the public can make an appointment online by providing their personal particulars and choosing the testing location and time slot. Booking arrangements and other details will be announced in due course.

"Specimens will be collected by trained medical or healthcare staff. They will collect the combined nasal and throat swabs of participants for laboratory testing. People whose test results are negative will be informed by SMS through their mobile phones. If a test result is positive, the Department of Health will take follow-up action immediately."

The spokesman stressed that the UCTP will only do testing for COVID-19. All testing will be conducted in Hong Kong. Specimens will not be transported outside Hong Kong and they will be destroyed after testing.

"We will handle the personal data of members of the public very carefully. No personal particulars will be indicated on the sampling bottles of the programme. The testing agencies will know only the serial numbers but not the identities of specimen owners. Moreover, no personal information (including specimens and test results) will be transported outside Hong Kong. The workflow also does not involve the provision of any personal data to any organisations or persons outside Hong Kong. Information of individual cases with positive results will be passed to the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority for follow-up. Personal Information and test results of other cases will be deleted after completion of the programme. Specimens will also be destroyed after completion of the programme."

Laboratory testing and surveillance are important elements in the

Government's anti-epidemic work. The spokesman appealed to members of the public to fight the virus together and join the UCTP for the sake of their health and that of their families, with a view to winning the battle against the virus as soon as possible.