

Vaccination in lieu of regular testing arrangement covers all government employees

The Government announced today (August 2) that starting today, all government employees will be subject to the vaccination in lieu of regular testing (VRT) arrangement so as to ensure that government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) have strong defense against the COVID-19 virus and its mutant strains.

Regardless of their duties, work nature and work place, all government employees covering civil servants and full-time or part-time government employees appointed on non-civil service terms who have not received the first dose of a vaccine are required to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 (PCR tests) using combined nasal and throat swabs (CNTS) at Community Testing Centres (CTCs) on a bi-weekly basis.

"All government employees have an obligation to get vaccinated. It is also their responsibility of contributing to a healthy working environment and not posing themselves as a risk to co-workers and the public," a spokesman for the Civil Service Bureau said.

"Under the new arrangement, government employees can still choose whether to get vaccinated or not. If they choose not to receive vaccination, they are required to undergo bi-weekly PCR tests at CTCs. The claim that government employees are forced to receive vaccination is misleading and unfounded."

The VRT arrangement has been implemented for frontline government employees since May 31. The first phase covered frontline government employees who are regularly involved in enforcement, inspection and investigation duties and have frequent and close contact with members of the public, or are involved in high risk duties. It was expanded to cover all frontline government employees from July 19.

The Government has stated on various occasions earlier that it would consider requesting government employees who have not received vaccination on non-medical reasons to undertake regular testing at their own expense. "Ample time has been provided for government employees to receive vaccination and the arrangement of vaccination leave has also been introduced a few months ago. According to the latest information on applications for vaccination leave provided by B/Ds, as at today, 70 per cent of civil servants have received their first dose of a vaccine," the spokesman said.

"If individual government employees choose not to receive vaccination out of personal choice but not medical reasons, it is unreasonable for the Government to expend public money on their PCR tests for a long period of

time. It is neither justifiable nor in line with the principle of effective use of resources. Moreover, it is not fair to those who have been vaccinated to have to shoulder the work of those who choose not to do so when the latter leave the office during the office hours to undergo PCR tests."

For government employees who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination due to medical conditions supported by a valid medical certificate, they are still required to undergo bi-weekly CNTS PCR tests. Relevant B/Ds will allow these employees as far as possible to undergo regular PCR tests provided that departmental operations are not affected. B/Ds will continue to fund their tests on a reimbursement basis.

With effect from September 1, save for those who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of medical conditions supported by a medical certificate, all government employees who have not received their first dose of a vaccine should take the regular PCR tests at CTCs outside working hours and pay for these tests at their own expense.