



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

15 December 2020

Ms Maisie Lam
Clerk to Subcommittee
Council Business Division
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road, Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Lam,

**Requirements on compulsory testing for staff members of
residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with
disabilities and nursing homes**

Thank you for your letter of 11 December 2020 on the captioned matter. In consultation with the Social Welfare Department, our reply is set out below –

The health and life of elderly persons and persons with disabilities living in residential care homes could be under serious threat if they are infected by COVID-19. As at 10 December 2020, a total of 124 confirmed cases of COVID-19 involved elderly persons living in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), of whom 32 passed away; while a total of 82 residents of residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) were confirmed with COVID-19. In view of the situation, there is a pressing need to ramp up testing on this front.

In order to safeguard the health of residents and staff members of residential care homes, the Secretary for Food and Health issued two compulsory testing notices under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) on 30 November and 11 December 2020, requiring staff members of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes (NHs) to undergo polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 between 1 and 14 December 2020 and between 15 and 28 December 2020 respectively in accordance with the requirements and procedures specified in the notices.

Regarding the testing method, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) requires that the testing specimens of the residential care home staff members be combined nasal and throat swabs which must not be taken by the persons to be tested. This is to ensure

the effectiveness and accuracy of compulsory testing. In fact, from mid-July to end-November, SWD conducted five rounds of COVID-19 testing for staff members of all RCHEs, RCHDs and NHs in Hong Kong. Of the five rounds, three were conducted by means of self-collected deep throat saliva, and quite a number of staff members did not participate in the testing for various reasons. Against the above background, using self-collected specimens for compulsory testing for the residential care home staff members is considered not desirable. On the contrary, methods other than self-collection provide greater certainty for carrying out compulsory testing. In fact, specimen collection in the recently-commenced compulsory testing for taxi drivers is performed by designated personnel. From 15 December onwards, the specimen collection method for persons arriving in Hong Kong via the airport will also be changed from self-collection of deep throat saliva to collection by designated personnel.

Upon conclusion of the first round compulsory testing arrangements and having regard to opinions from the sector, the Government has streamlined the testing procedures in two aspects so as to facilitate testing for the residential care home staff members concerned. Details are as follows:

(i) We have significantly increased the number of locations for providing testing services. At present, 18 Community Testing Centres in various districts have commenced services; and

ii) We have also provided additional testing means in the second round of compulsory testing. Apart from attending a testing centre set up by the Government for the test or arranging for the carrying out of the test by staff at a government-recognised laboratory at one's own expense, the second round of compulsory testing allows residential care homes to arrange with government-recognised laboratories for testing for their staff members. The relevant specimens for testing must be collected by healthcare professionals or trained personnel. This allows greater flexibility for the residential care homes in their respective testing arrangements.

Yours sincerely,


(Sophia Hui)

for Secretary for Food and Health