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## San Francisco to launch a COVID-19 mass testing plan for Chinatown residents

By Han Li



Significant progress is finally made to address a public health concern in the most densely-populated neighborhood in San Francisco.

Chinatown, with more than 10,000 residents crowding within the 24 square blocks, will host an unprecedented, free mass testing plan to prevent or detect any possible COVID-19 outbreaks, which have been haunting the community for months.

Most of Chinatown residents live in the single-room-occupancy(SRO) building, sharing bathrooms and kitchens in tiny spaces. This setting disqualifies the buildings from being a quarantine option, and no clear guidelines have ever been issued for SRO tenants if some of them tested positive of the highly contagious virus.

Chinese Hospital, the major healthcare provider located in Chinatown, is now collaborating with the Department of Public Health(DPH), NICOS Chinese Health Coalition, and some other community partners, preparing to launch the testing strategy this week.

“We are closely working with DPH”, Dr. Jian Zhang(張建清), the CEO of Chinese Hospital, told the World Journal. “We are now in the final step discussing the logistics, the testing kits materials, lab work, and establish the tracking and surveillance system.”

The real-life conduction of mass testing can be quick, Zhang said, detailing that they can set up testing tents right next to the SRO building, and the residents can just come down, get tested, and leave.

One SRO building on Waverly Street(天后廟街) is chosen to be in the pilot program. The building is owned by Ning Yung(寧陽) Benevolent Association, a family association landlord who owns several other SRO buildings.

“I already distributed the participation forms to the tenants”, said Ding Lee(李殿邦), the head of Ning Yung. He said the building has 24 units and is relatively a small residential property.

After collecting the information, he will send the forms to the Chinese Hospital, who will construct a system following every Chinatown individual’s health condition. “I hope this high-risk group of people can be taken care of, receiving some medical resources from the city,” said Ding Lee. The earliest of the testing will possibly start this Friday.

One of the unsolved difficulties is how to quarantine the confirmed cases, and the elected officials are gearing up to force the city to provide hotel rooms.

Supervisor Aaron Peskin, whose district includes Chinatown, introduces a new law to place SRO residents “who meet the criteria for isolation or quarantine in solitary hotel rooms”. Supervisor Hillary Ronen and Matt Haney are co-sponsors.

The legislation also asks the city to provide comprehensive assistance to SRO tenants, including establishing a telephone hotline to respond to questions, giving out face coverings, and publish daily aggregate data among SRO residents.

The mayor’s office, who has been stranded in the battle of the hotel room access with supervisors and homeless advocates, hasn’t spoken out about the new law to extend the coverage to SRO tenants.

Another challenge is that some SRO tenants are reluctant to get tested, worrying no place to go, won’t get sufficient medical supports, or even get evicted if tested positive.

Peskin has paired up a piece of legislation to ban the eviction of SRO tenants due to pandemic-related reasons. And Ding Lee also emphasized that this is a public health issue so vulnerable seniors should participate without hesitation.

The number of confirmed cases in the Chinatown area is the lowest among all zip codes of San Francisco, and the community has been praised because of the early action and strong vigilance.

The city has launched large-scale testing in the Mission District, a traditional Latino immigrant neighborhood, discovering an appallingly large number of asymptomatic confirmed positive cases. Dr. Zhang said the Chinatown community, especially the elderly are highly aware and start to self-protect in an early stage, so she believed a huge outbreak wouldn’t occur in Chinatown after the mass testing.