

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (January 28), 23 patients who had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus (case numbers: 12640, 12641, 12668, 12670, 12677, 12686, 12839, 12877, 12902, 12925, 12927, 12946, 12950, 12953, 12959, 12964, 12990, 12994, 13002, 13006, 13007, 13021 and 13380) were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 12 710 patients have been discharged.

A total of 808 patients who had tested positive are currently hospitalised in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, the Hospital Authority (HA) Infectious Disease Centre, the Community Treatment Facility at AsiaWorld-Expo and 12 public hospitals. All of them are in stable condition.

The HA will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

CHP investigates 83 confirmed and 32 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 39 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 28) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 28, the CHP was investigating 83 additional confirmed cases and 32 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 115 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 13 533 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 365 and seven respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 905 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of four imported cases, 66 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, six local cases, and 39 cases

epidemiologically linked with local cases. One-hundred-and-eleven of the cases involve mutant strains, the mutation test results of two cases are pending and the viral load of the remaining two cases is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise 57 males and 58 females, aged six-month-old to 89. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk). Case status and classification may be subject to changes when there is new information available during epidemiological investigation and latest information is shown on "COVID-19 Thematic Website".

As at 4pm today, a total of 774 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 14 to 27). Five-hundred-and-three of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases, 37 are local cases, 76 are cases epidemiologically linked with local case, and the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 13152, 13153, 13189, 13192, 13195, 13202, 13203, 13205, 13209, 13211, 13213, 13214, 13216, 13223, 13236, 13239, 13248, 13251, 13256, 13271, 13277, 13279, 13284, 13312, 13329, 13332, 13340, 13346, 13353, 13360, 13391, 13420, 13427, 13428, 13452, 13463, 13488, 13506 and 13507 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 715 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

According to the testing and quarantine arrangements for cases with mutant strains, persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on specified dates in accordance with the announcement by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day (see the details of the buildings and dates of testing at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf).

The CHP strongly reminded members of the public to strictly follow the compulsory testing requirements and undergo the multiple tests on time as required. The compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well. The Government will seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notices. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months. Relevant officers of different government departments are empowered to perform certain functions under the relevant Regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), including requesting individuals to provide information and assistance when necessary. Any person who fails to comply with the relevant request commits an offence and would be liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). The Government reiterates that the aim of issuing a compulsory testing notice is to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the community as soon as possible to protect overall public

health and safety.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that the global situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility. With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with the recently tightened social distancing measures, and to refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings (particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

Disbursement of one-off ex-gratia payment to pet shops selling hamsters under Anti-epidemic Fund

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (January 28) announced that a one-off ex-gratia payment under the Anti-epidemic Fund would be disbursed to all local pet shops selling hamsters.

A spokesman for the AFCD said, "To minimise the risks of COVID-19 transmission from hamsters, the AFCD earlier on announced a series of measures including suspending the business of pet shops selling hamsters; taking all hamsters on sale for COVID-19 virus tests and humane dispatch; suspending import of all small mammals including hamsters immediately, and conducting a review of quarantine requirements for importing these animals. All these measures have affected the business of local pet shops selling hamsters. To provide financial relief to the pet shops, the AFCD today announced that pet shops holding a valid Animal Trader Licence for selling hamsters may apply to the AFCD for a one-off ex-gratia payment under the Anti-epidemic Fund."

Each eligible pet shop is entitled to a one-off ex-gratia payment of between \$10,000 and \$30,000 according to its floor area. Eligible pet shop licensees can apply from tomorrow onwards until February 25. The AFCD will take the initiative to invite eligible applicants, send out application forms by email and provide necessary assistance to them. For enquiries, please call 2150 6904.

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Tsuen Wan

The Government today (January 28) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 8.30pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Tsuen Wan (i.e. Tai Yuen House, 77-83 Tai Pa Street, Tsuen Wan, excluding the shops located on the ground floor of Tai Yuen House. See Annex) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about 7am tomorrow (January 29).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As a case tested positive who has lived in the abovementioned building was detected today, and the test result involved a mutant strain, the risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area".

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 10.30pm tonight. Arrangements will be made for persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around 7am tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

According to the compulsory testing notice to be issued today, any person who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from January 22, 2022 to January 28, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before January 30, 2022. As a mutant strain is involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

In addition, in accordance with the latest arrangement, persons who resided in the same building as the case involving a mutant strain are required to undergo compulsory testing on days 2, 3, 4 and 7 counting from the day subsequent to that when the case last stayed in that building before being admitted to hospital for treatment or leaving Hong Kong.

The Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2835 1473) which starts operation at 8.30pm today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

CHP investigates suspected food poisoning case related to wild

mushrooms

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (January 28) investigating a suspected case of food poisoning related to the consumption of wild mushrooms, and urged the public not to collect and eat wild mushrooms from parks or the countryside.

A 65-year-old male patient developed vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and dizziness, about twelve hours after consuming mushrooms at home on January 26. The patient sought medical attention at the Accident and Emergency Department of Prince of Wales Hospital yesterday (January 27) and was admitted to the hospital for further management. He has been in a stable condition.

Initial investigations revealed that the patient had consumed wild mushrooms picked from the hillside near Wong Tai Sin and Sha Tin on January 25. The CHP investigations are ongoing.

"Mushroom poisoning is generally acute. Common presentations include gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain appearing shortly after ingestion. Depending on the mushroom species, patients may also have other symptoms such as profuse sweating, hallucinations, coma or other neurological symptoms as well as liver failure. Death may result in severe cases," a CHP spokesman said.

"We advise the public to buy mushrooms from reputable and reliable suppliers and not to buy mushroom products which may be mixed with unknown species. Members of the public should not pick wild mushrooms for consumption as it is difficult to distinguish edible mushroom species from inedible ones. Mixing of edible species with inedible or poisonous species of mushrooms will not dilute toxicity. Cooking in most cases does not destroy toxicity," the spokesman added.

"If mushroom poisoning is suspected, the patient should seek immediate medical attention and bring along any available remnant for identification," the spokesman said.