

CHP investigates 102 confirmed and 38 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 16 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases and updates environmental samples results of relevant pet shops

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 23) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 23, the CHP was investigating 102 additional confirmed cases and 38 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 140 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 13 034 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 248 and four respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 286 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of 15 imported case, 112 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, four local cases, and nine cases epidemiologically linked with local cases. One-hundred-and-thirty-three of the cases involve mutant strains, the mutation test results of six cases are pending and the viral load of the remaining case is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise 63 males and 77 females, aged two-month-old to 90. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

A total of 244 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 9 to 22). Ninety-five of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases, eight are local cases, 10 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 13077, 13078, 13080 to 13084, 13089, 13091 to 13095 and 13097 to 13099 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 533 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

The CHP is also following up on cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 related to pet shops. As of today, 13 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 are related to pet shops, including four additional cases 13154, 13157, 13267 and 13281. Epidemiological investigations on the cases are ongoing. As at

January 23 evening, the CHP has collected a total of 738 environmental samples from relevant pet shops and relevant warehouses and the laboratory testing has completed, in which a total of 35 environmental samples tested positive. The latest laboratory testing results revealed that environmental samples collected from one additional animal boarding establishment (I Love Rabbit at 27B Lee Garden Road, Causeway Bay) tested positive. As a prudent measure, the newly added venue above will be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues from January 7 to January 18 need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date(s). The staff members of the venue above will be arranged to undergo compulsory quarantine at the quarantine centre.

Also, as the passenger flight (QR818) operated by Qatar Airways arriving in Hong Kong from Doha, Qatar, on January 21, had 11 passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit the landing of passenger flights in Hong Kong from Doha operated by Qatar Airways from January 23 to February 5.

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.

With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to comply with the recently tightened social distancing measures in the next two weeks, 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.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed, "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. Hong Kong reported the first imported case two years ago, on January 23, 2020. We are grateful to all frontline healthcare staff and our DH staff for their dedicated work and contribution to the fight against the pandemic during the past two years. We also wish to thank the public for their cooperation with the various anti-epidemic measures implemented by the Government, and appeal for their continuous support in safeguarding the health of themselves and their families."