

CHP investigates 14 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has announced that as of 4pm today (July7), the CHP was investigating 14 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 1,300 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 1,299 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases announced today involve 10 males and four females aged between 14 and 85. Among them, five had travel history during the incubation period.

As for the local cases, as the 1298th case involved a resident of a residential care home for the elderly (RCHE), residents and staff of the RCHE who were identified as close contacts and will be required to be sent to quarantine centres for quarantine. Noting that residents of the RCHE might have special care needs, the DH staff has conducted a site visit with personnel from the Hospital Authority and officers from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to determine if the environment of the RCHE is suitable for on-site quarantine of residents.

As the RCHE is considered by DH not suitable for quarantine of residents upon inspection, the Government has activated the Hong Kong PHAB Association Jockey Club PHAB Camp as a quarantine centre for residents of the RCHE who are close contacts of the confirmed case and are bedridden or requiring special care during the quarantine period.

The SWD will arrange for care workers to attend to the needs of residents who need to be admitted to this quarantine centre.

For other local cases announced today, in addition to distributing deep throat saliva specimen bottles to residents of buildings where the patients live at and students/teachers of school where a patient attended during the infectious period, the CHP has also adopted a further precautionary measure for early detection of possible transmission in the community. The CHP will distribute deep throat saliva specimen bottles by post to those who visited Sun Fat Restaurant (Address: 26-28 Man Ying Street, Ferry Point, Jordan) in connection with case 1289 from June 23 and those who visited Rich Pot (Address: Shop 137, 1/F, Kings Wing Plaza 1, 3 On Kwan Street, Shek Mun, Sha Tin) in connection with case 1293 from July 1. The related patrons can provide their name, postal address and date(s) of visit to the CHP via email (bottle@dh.gov.hk) for mailing of the specimen bottles to them. They are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex.

As some recent confirmed cases of COVID-19 involved persons exempted from compulsory quarantine, starting tomorrow (July 8), crew members of aircrafts and vessels entering Hong Kong via the Hong Kong International Airport will be subject to a mandatory COVID-19 testing at the DH Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at the AsiaWorld-Expo, in addition to a 14-day medical surveillance, upon arrival.

Meanwhile, in a meeting on July 3, the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (SCEZD) under the CHP has reviewed the criteria for releasing confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) patients from isolation and made updated recommendations based on the prevailing scientific understandings on COVID-19. The revised recommendations supersede the previous one made on May 6.

The updated criteria for releasing a confirmed COVID-19 patient from isolation are as follows:

For symptomatic patients:

1. Ten days have passed since the onset of illness; AND
2. Their clinical conditions improve and they are afebrile; AND
3. Either one of the following laboratory criteria:
 - With two clinical specimens of the same type (i.e. respiratory or stool) tested negative for nucleic acid of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) by reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) taken at least 24 hours apart. For patients ever with stool specimen(s) tested positive, they should have two negative stool specimens collected 24 hours apart before release from isolation; or
 - Tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibody.

For patients who did not develop any COVID-19 compatible symptoms all along:

1. Five days after the first positive RT-PCR test for SARS-CoV-2; AND
2. Either one of the following laboratory criteria:
 - With two clinical specimens of the same type (i.e. respiratory or stool) tested negative for nucleic acid of SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR taken at least 24 hours apart. For patients ever with stool specimen(s) tested positive, they should have two negative stool specimens collected 24 hours apart before release from isolation; or
 - Tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibody.

The CHP again urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives to minimise the risk of infection. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use. After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work

or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.