

CHP investigates 59 additional cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 4pm yesterday (March 29), the CHP is investigating 59 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19, taking the number of cases to 642 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 641 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Moreover, the DH has further extended its Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme yesterday to all asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving from all places under the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E).

Specimen collection containers will be provided to these travellers at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) for collection of their deep throat saliva samples for testing. The DH has set up a Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at the AsiaWorld-Expo (TSCC) to speed up the collection of specimen from inbound travellers from overseas for conducting testing for COVID-19, and facilitate those who have difficulty in arranging family members or friends to submit their specimen during home quarantine.

The DH urges the relevant inbound travellers to proceed to the TSCC immediately from the HKIA. They should provide their deep throat saliva sample in accordance with the instructions and submit it to the DH personnel on duty at the TSCC, for sending to the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch for COVID-19 testing as soon as possible.

Those travellers who opt to collect their own deep throat saliva sample during home quarantine should do so at the earliest opportunity and ask their family members or friends to deliver it to any of the collection points in the same morning. The collection points are 13 designated chest clinics or dermatological clinics under the DH from 9am to 11am on Monday to Sunday and also some General Out-patient clinics under the Hospital Authority from 8.30am to 9.30am on Monday to Friday (except public holiday).

The newly reported cases announced yesterday involve 30 males and 29 females aged between 11 and 77. Among them, 43 had travel history during the incubation period and 18 are overseas students. 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.

For information on flights that patients of the confirmed cases have taken, please refer to the following webpage: (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/flights_trains_en.pdf). Passengers who travelled on the same flights and sat within two seats surrounding those patients are urged to call the CHP hotlines 2125 1111 and 2125 1122.

The CHP urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives. 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.

In particular, the CHP reminded those who have returned to Hong Kong from overseas or visited overseas before the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) took effect on March 19 that, although they are not subject to the 14-day compulsory quarantine, they should stay home and avoid going out as far as possible for 14 days. They should wear surgical mask, maintain stringent personal hygiene as a measure to protect themselves and their family members. They should seek medical advice as soon as possible if symptoms develop to safeguard the health of themselves, family and friends as well as the general public.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "In view of proliferation of the disease and 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, and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps); 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."

The CHP will report the cases to the World Health Organization, National Health Commission, Health Commission of Guangdong Province, relevant health authorities and the Hospital Authority.

The CHP has set up the hotlines (2125 1111 and 2125 1122), which operate from 8am to midnight daily, for public enquiries. As at 4pm yesterday, a total of 68 592 calls were received.

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on the COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates.

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 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 door knobs, 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 liter of water into each drain outlet (U-traps) 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.