

CHP investigates six confirmed and 18 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 14 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 10) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 10, the CHP was investigating six additional confirmed cases and 18 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 24 additional cases tested positive for 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 12 792 so far and starting from January 1 recorded with 167 asymptomatic cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 12 959 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of 19 imported case, four cases epidemiologically linked with imported case, and one possibly import-related case. Nineteen of the cases involved mutant strains, mutation test results of two cases are pending, and the viral loads of the remaining three cases are insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise eight males and 16 females, aged 20 to 88. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The four cases epidemiologically linked with imported case are 12941 (66-year-old female who lives at the same building as cases 12854, 12909 and 12910, i.e. Mei Sun Building, 4-20 Kau Hui Chik Street, Tai Po), 12960 (51-year-old female who is a close contact of case 12860), 12944 (88-year-old female who is a family member of case 12960 living together) and 12962 (43-year-old female who had a meal with case 12838 before they attended a gathering at Reserva Ibérica Tapas Bar & Restaurant, Causeway Centre, Wan Chai, in the evening on January 3 together). The possibly import-related case is 12945 (20-year-old female who lives in Tower 8, Aegean Coast, Tuen Mun).

A total of 345 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (December 27, 2021, to January 9, 2022). Thirty-six of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, one is a local case, while the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 12719, 12721, 12748 to 12750, 12781, 12782, 12788, 12789, 12796 and 12801 to 12804 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 279 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

Also, as a passenger flight (EK384) operated by Emirates from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, and Bangkok, Thailand, arriving in Hong Kong on January 8 had nine 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 from Dubai and Bangkok operated by Emirates in Hong Kong from January 10 to 23.

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, and there are also reports of breakthrough infections in some vaccinated individuals. The CHP strongly urges members of the public to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong, in particular to specified places with high risk under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary

Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H)."