

# CHP investigates locally acquired SARS-CoV-2 virus cases with 3 821 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and 12 150 cases by RATs as well as 982 imported cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 21) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, December 21, the CHP was investigating 15 971 additional locally acquired cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, comprising 3 821 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (1 817 confirmed cases, 1 659 asymptomatic cases and 345 cases with pending status) and 12 150 cases that tested positive by rapid antigen tests (RATs) in the past 24 hours.

Separately, 982 additional imported cases were reported, including 776 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (134 confirmed cases, 557 asymptomatic cases and 85 cases with pending status) and 206 cases that tested positive by RATs. Among the additional imported cases, 489 of them involved samples at the airport, 378 of them involved samples during Day 1 to Day 3, and the remaining 115 involved samples during Day 4 to Day 7.

Hong Kong has recorded a total of 1 123 458 and 1 278 780 cases that have tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations of the cases. Please refer to the Annex and the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" ([www.coronavirus.gov.hk](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk)) for more information.

The CHP has been closely monitoring the situation of positive cases involving mutant strains by genetic analysis. As of 0.00am, December 21, the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) had identified 226 cases of sub-lineage XBB, six of XBD, eight of BA.2.75.2, seven of BA.4.6, 13 of BF.7 and 38 of BQ.1.1 among imported cases in Hong Kong, while 149 cases of sub-lineage XBB, 18 of XBD, one of BA.2.75.2, 11 of BF.7 and 171 of BQ.1.1 have also been detected among local cases.

Among the specimens received by the DH's PHLSB during December 12 to 18 for verification testing of local cases, 0 per cent and about 52.78 per cent of them (seven-day moving average) are related to the sub-lineages BA.2.12.1 and BA.4/BA.5 (including suspected cases) of the Omicron mutant strain respectively.

In addition, as of 0.00am, December 21, a total of 11 080 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 10 977 and 99 deaths reported

from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively as well as four deaths reported from private hospitals. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 11 293 death cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Furthermore, among the earlier cases by nucleic acid tests reported, there were cases (including pending cases) changed to confirmed, asymptomatic or re-positive cases. As at yesterday (December 20), the total number of confirmed cases was 489 203, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 379 828, 31 and 249 799 respectively.

The spokesman for the CHP said that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. People who have yet to receive vaccination, especially senior citizens, chronic patients, children and other immunocompromised persons who face a higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, should get vaccinated as early as possible for self-protection and to reduce the risk of falling seriously ill and death should they get infected.

The CHP appeals to the community to keep on maintaining personal hygiene and comply with social distancing measures in order to jointly contain the risk of virus transmission. The spokesman reminded members of the public that they can call various hotlines to make enquiries on COVID-19 ([www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html#hotline](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html#hotline)).

---

## **Hong Kong's Balance of Payments and International Investment Position statistics for third quarter of 2022**

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (December 21) the preliminary Balance of Payments (BoP) and International Investment Position (IIP) statistics of Hong Kong for the third quarter of 2022. This release also included the preliminary External Debt (ED) statistics of Hong Kong for the same period.

### **I. Balance of Payments**

Hong Kong recorded a BoP deficit of \$138.4 billion (19.0% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) in the third quarter of 2022. Reserve assets correspondingly decreased by the same amount. This compared with a BoP deficit of \$159.8 billion (23.7% of GDP) in the second quarter of 2022.

Current account

The current account recorded a surplus of \$115.8 billion (15.9% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2022. This implies that Hong Kong's savings was greater than its investment, enabling Hong Kong to accumulate external financial assets (such as equity securities or debt securities) as a buffer against global financial volatilities. Compared with the current account surplus of \$91.0 billion (12.4% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2021, the increase in surplus was mainly due to the increases in goods surplus and services surplus.

The goods surplus increased to \$13.2 billion in the third quarter of 2022, compared with \$3.2 billion in the same quarter of 2021. Over the same period, the services surplus increased from \$34.0 billion to \$43.6 billion. The primary income inflow and outflow amounted to \$480.2 billion and \$417.4 billion respectively, thus yielding a net inflow of \$62.8 billion in the third quarter of 2022, compared with a net inflow of \$58.8 billion in the same quarter of 2021.

#### Financial account

An overall net outflow of financial non-reserve assets amounting to \$286.7 billion (39.3% of GDP) was recorded in the third quarter of 2022, compared with an overall net outflow of \$220.8 billion (32.7% of GDP) in the second quarter of 2022. The overall net outflow recorded in the third quarter of 2022 was due to net outflows of portfolio investment and other investment, partly offset by net inflows of cash settlement of financial derivatives and direct investment.

In the third quarter of 2022, reserve assets decreased by \$138.4 billion, compared with a decrease of \$159.8 billion in the second quarter of 2022.

## II. International Investment Position

At the end of the third quarter of 2022, both Hong Kong's external financial assets and liabilities stood at a very high level, amounting to \$46,499.8 billion (16.4 times of GDP) and \$33,532.2 billion (11.8 times of GDP) respectively, a typical feature of a prominent international financial centre.

Hong Kong's net external financial assets (i.e. assets minus liabilities) amounted to \$12,967.6 billion (4.6 times of GDP) at the end of the third quarter of 2022, compared with \$14,804.5 billion (5.2 times of GDP) at the end of the second quarter of 2022. Hong Kong's net external financial assets to GDP ratio is one of the largest in the world, which provides the economy with a strong cushion against sudden external shocks.

## III. External Debt

At the end of the third quarter of 2022, Hong Kong's gross ED amounted to \$14,309.9 billion (5.0 times of GDP). Compared with \$14,421.4 billion (5.1 times of GDP) at the end of the second quarter of 2022, gross ED decreased by \$111.6 billion. This was mainly attributable to the decrease in

ED of the banking sector, partly offset by the increases in ED of other sectors and ED of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority.

As one of the world's major financial centres, Hong Kong has a significant amount of ED held against the local banking sector arising through normal banking businesses. At the end of the third quarter of 2022, 58.3% of Hong Kong's ED was attributable to the banking sector. Other ED mainly consisted of ED of other sectors (25.3%) and debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending) (15.9%).

#### Further information

BoP is a statistical statement that systematically summarises, for a specific time period (typically a year or a quarter), the economic transactions of an economy with the rest of the world (i.e. between residents and non-residents).

IIP is a balance sheet showing the stock of external financial assets and liabilities of an economy at a particular time point. The difference between the external financial assets and liabilities is the net IIP of the economy, which represents either its net claim on or net liability to the rest of the world.

Gross ED, at a particular time point, is the outstanding amount of those actual current, and not contingent, liabilities that are owed to non-residents by residents of an economy and that require payment of principals and/or interests by the debtors at some time points in the future.

Table 1 presents Hong Kong's BoP. Table 2 presents the detailed current account, while Table 3 presents the detailed capital and financial account. Table 4 shows Hong Kong's IIP, and Table 5 shows Hong Kong's ED.

Statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for the third quarter of 2022 are preliminary figures, which are subject to revision upon the availability of more data. With the incorporation of the latest data from surveys and other sources, the statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for 2021 have been revised.

More details of the statistics of BoP (including seasonally adjusted current account), IIP and ED, together with the conceptual and methodological details, are presented in the publication Balance of Payments, International Investment Position and External Debt Statistics of Hong Kong, Third Quarter 2022 published by the C&SD. Users can download the publication at the website of the C&SD

([www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1040001&scode=260](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1040001&scode=260)).

â€‹

For enquiries about the BoP, IIP and ED statistics, please contact the Balance of Payments Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 6979; fax: 2116 0278; email: [bop@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:bop@censtatd.gov.hk)).

---

# Government follows up on positive results of sewage surveillance and appeals to residents to undergo virus testing

The Government announced today (December 21) that in order to fight the coronavirus epidemic, the Environmental Protection Department and the Drainage Services Department have been collecting sewage samples for virus testing in all districts, and had detected positive results in some areas, indicating that there may be hidden cases in the premises within these areas.

## Rapid test

As regards positive sewage testing results with relatively high viral loads in the following areas, the Housing Department and the respective District Offices will commence distributing about 50 000 sets of the COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits to residents, cleaning workers and property management staff working in the following areas for them to take the test on their own, in order to help identify infected persons:

- Kowloon City District – Residential premises around Sa Po Road and Carpenter Road (See Annex)
- Wong Tai Sin District – Mei Tung Estate
- Yuen Long District – Tin Yan Estate

Members of the public may refer to ([www.coronavirus.gov.hk/rat/eng/rat.html](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/rat/eng/rat.html)) for enquiries relating to the use of the RAT kits.

When using an RAT kit, please pay attention to and follow the instructions from the manufacturer to perform the test and read the result properly. It is advisable to record the displayed result by taking a photo immediately after reading. Users should wash their hands before and after performing the tests, and avoid placing non-essential items within the specimen collection area. After completing the test, wrap and seal all components of the test kit carefully and dispose properly. If the household environment is contaminated during the specimen collecting process, disinfection should be conducted with 1 in 49 diluted bleach solution or 70 per cent alcohol.

People who obtained a positive result through an RAT for the first time can report via the online platform "Declaration System for individuals tested positive for COVID-19 using Rapid Antigen Test" ([www.chp.gov.hk/ratp](http://www.chp.gov.hk/ratp)). If individuals encounter difficulties using the online platform, they can call

the automated system at 183 6119 to register their identification document and telephone number. The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health will contact the relevant person later to finish the report procedure.

---

## [Hong Kong Customs detects two smuggling cases by ocean-going vessels involving goods worth about \\$200 million \(with photos\)](#)

â€‹Hong Kong Customs on December 11 and 12 mounted a special enforcement operation codenamed "Convoy" and detected two suspected cases of using ocean-going vessels to smuggle goods to the Mainland at Tsing Yi Container Terminal. A large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including expensive food ingredients, electronic goods, vinyl records, table wines, medicine and scheduled endangered species, with a total estimated market value of about \$200 million was seized.

Through intelligence analysis and risk assessment, Customs early this month discovered that criminals may use ocean-going vessels to smuggle goods to the Mainland and then formulated strategic enforcement operations. Two ocean-going vessels prepared to depart from Hong Kong to Shanghai were successfully identified.

Customs officers identified for inspection eight containers declared as carrying plastic materials and four containers declared as carrying household products on board the two vessels, and found inside nine containers a large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including about 22 tonnes of expensive food ingredients such as dried shark fins, dried fish maws and dried sea cucumbers, over 140 000 electronic goods, about 70 000 pieces of vinyl records, about 9 000 bottles of table wines, about 4 000 boxes of medicine and scheduled endangered species.

After follow-up investigations, Customs officers arrested five men aged between 38 and 54 suspected to be connected with the cases.

Investigation is ongoing. The five arrested persons have been released on bail pending further investigation and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Being a government department specifically responsible for tackling smuggling, Customs has all along been combating various smuggling activities proactively at the forefront. Customs will keep up its enforcement action and continue to fiercely combat sea smuggling activities through proactive risk management and intelligence-based enforcement strategies, along with mounting

targeted anti-smuggling operations at suitable times to land a solid blow against relevant activities.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years. Moreover, any person who imports or exports pharmaceutical products and medicines without a valid licence commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered species without a licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account ([crimereport@customs.gov.hk](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)).





---

## Import of poultry meat and products from areas in Hungary and Poland suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 21) that in view of notifications from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the General Veterinary Inspectorate of Poland about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in areas in Hungary and Poland, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the relevant areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

â€‹The relevant areas are as follows:

Hungary

(1) Hajdú-Bihar County

Poland

Kujawsko-pomorskie Region

(2) Lipnowski District

WarmiÅ„sko-Mazurskie Region

(3) Piski District

(4) IÅ„awski District

Lubelskie Region

(5) ÅÄ™czyÅ„ski District

Mazowieckie Region

(6) GostyniÅ„ski District

Åódzkie Region

(7) Sieradzki District

A CFS spokesman said that Hong Kong currently has an established protocol with Hungary for the import of poultry meat but not for poultry eggs. According to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 250 tonnes of frozen poultry meat from Hungary, and about 2 000 tonnes of frozen poultry meat and about 15.4 million poultry eggs from Poland in the first nine months of this year.

â€œ" The CFS has contacted the Hungarian and Polish authorities over the issues and will closely monitor information issued by the WOA and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.