

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

The Government announced today (May 20) 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 respective District Offices will commence distributing about 200 000 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:

- Tai Po District – Tai Wo Estate, Tai Po Garden, Tai Po Tau Shui Wai, Parc Versailles and Po Nga Court
- Sha Tin District – Villa Oceania, Bayshore Towers, The Tolo Place, Ma On Shan Centre, Sunshine City, Fok On Garden and Yiu On Estate
- Central and Western District – Poksmith Villa, Pokfield Garden, Sun Fat Building, Wai Wah Court, University Heights; residential premises around Sands Street, North Street and Smithfield (See Annex)

Members of the public may refer to (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 of them 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). 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.

HKSAR Government strongly opposes European Commission Report

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government today (May 20) expressed strong opposition to the remarks in the report on Hong Kong issued by the European Commission (EU) and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (the Report).

"We strongly oppose the various unfounded criticisms and misleading comments against the HKSAR Government in the Report. The HKSAR is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China (PRC), is a local administrative region that enjoys a high degree of autonomy under 'one country, two systems' and comes directly under the Central People's Government (CPG). The HKSAR Government urges again the EU to respect the international law and basic norms governing international relations, and to stop interfering into the internal affairs of China through Hong Kong affairs."

Legislative Council General Election

"We strongly oppose the misleading accusations against the 2021 Legislative Council General Election (LCGE). The LCGE is an important election held after the improvements to the electoral system of the HKSAR which fully implements the principle of 'patriots administering Hong Kong'. The election was conducted in accordance with the law, and was open, fair, honest and efficient. The seventh-term Legislative Council was formed smoothly through elections. With over 1.3 million voters cast their ballots to elect 90 members from 153 candidates of different backgrounds and political views, it manifests the broad representation, political inclusiveness, balanced participation and fair competition of the new electoral system."

National Security Law

"We take great exceptions to the unfounded allegations against the National Security Law. Following the implementation of the National Security Law, chaos stopped and order has been restored in Hong Kong. The National Security Law ensures the resolute, full and faithful implementation of the

'one country, two systems' principle under which the people of Hong Kong administer Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy, and also clearly stipulates that human rights shall be respected and protected in safeguarding national security in the HKSAR. The rights and freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, of the press, of publication, of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration, enjoyed by residents of the HKSAR under the Basic Law and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as applicable to Hong Kong shall be protected in accordance with the law. The four categories of offences endangering national security stipulated under the National Security Law are clearly defined. Law-abiding people will not unwittingly violate the law."

"The HKSAR Government reiterates that all law enforcement actions taken by the law enforcement agencies under the National Security Law, or indeed any local legislation, are based on evidence, strictly according to the law and for the acts of the persons or entities concerned, and have nothing to do with their political stance, background or occupation."

"Article 63 of the Basic Law stipulates that prosecutions in the HKSAR are made by the Department of Justice, free from any interference. Prosecutorial decisions are based on an objective assessment of all admissible evidence, applicable laws and the Prosecution Code, without political considerations. Prosecutions would only commence if there is sufficient admissible evidence to support a reasonable prospect of conviction. No one should interfere with independent prosecutorial decisions which are carried out strictly in accordance with the law."

Judicial Independence

"The HKSAR has all along been unwaveringly committed to the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, which underpins the city's success as an international business and financial centre. Judicial independence in Hong Kong after the implementation of the National Security Law remains as robust as ever. The independence of the judiciary is constitutionally guaranteed under the Basic Law. That the courts of the HKSAR can exercise independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication free from any interference, has been enshrined under the Basic Law as set out in Articles 2, 19 and 85. Article 92 of the Basic Law also clearly stipulates that judges and other members of the judiciary of the HKSAR shall be chosen on the basis of their judicial and professional qualities."

Press Freedom

"Since the city returned to the Motherland, the HKSAR Government has been firmly committed to safeguarding the freedoms of the press and speech, both of which are protected under the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights."

"The HKSAR Government must also point out that the media landscape in Hong Kong is as vibrant as ever. A total of 210 media organisations, be they

based locally, in the Mainland or overseas, are registered with the HKSAR Government News and Media Information System of the Information Services Department at present, showing an increase after the implementation of the National Security Law. As always, the media can exercise their right to monitor the HKSAR Government's work, and their freedom of commenting on or even criticising government policies remains uninhibited as long as this is not in violation of the law."

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 0.00am today (May 20), a total of 553 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 are currently hospitalised for treatment, including 51 new patients. Among the patients staying in isolation facilities, 91 patients are in isolation wards, 23 patients are in second-tier isolation wards and 43 patients are in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, of which 15 in total are new patients. The rest of the confirmed patients are hospitalised or readmitted due to other medical reasons. Those patients have recovered and are non-infectious, and therefore do not need to be treated in isolation facilities. Among the hospitalised patients, 10 of them are in critical condition and 11 are in serious condition, of which three critical patients are receiving intensive care. There were 91 patients who have recovered, including 69 patients who have been discharged. In addition, four patients who passed away in public hospitals were reported.

In the fifth wave of the epidemic, there are 49 675 patients who have recovered so far, including 49 322 patients who have been discharged. And since early 2020, there are 62 055 patients who have recovered, including 61 702 patients who have been discharged.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

CHP investigates additional SARS-CoV-2

virus cases by nucleic acid tests and rapid antigen tests as well as 11 imported cases earlier involving Omicron mutant strain sub-lineage BA.2.12.1

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (May 20) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, May 20, the CHP was investigating 101 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by nucleic acid tests (26 confirmed cases, 63 asymptomatic cases and 12 cases with pending case status) in the past 24 hours. Separately, 142 additional positive cases through rapid antigen tests (RATs) (76 symptomatic cases and 66 asymptomatic cases) were reported. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 761 025 and 448 906 cases that have tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The aforementioned newly reported cases consist of 26 imported cases (20 cases and 6 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively). The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations on the cases. Please refer to the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for more information.

Meanwhile, whole genome sequencing analysis by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch confirmed that 11 earlier imported cases were found to carry the sub-lineage BA.2.12.1 under the Omicron mutant strain. The cases involve six males and five females aged 19 to 65 who arrived in Hong Kong from the United States, Turkey, the Netherlands and Nepal during the period from May 3 to 15. Six cases tested positive on arrival, three cases tested positive during compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotel, while the remaining two cases tested positive with their samples collected at community testing centre after completion of compulsory quarantine. Together with the above new cases, Hong Kong has recorded a total of 46 imported cases with BA.2.12.1.

The two cases involving the sub-lineage BA.2.12.1 who tested positive at community testing centre involve a couple (a 65-year-old male and a 64-year-old female), who arrived in Hong Kong from the United States on May 3. They tested negative on arrival and their several tests conducted during compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotel (Lan Kwai Fong Hotel @ Kau U Fong) all tested negative. Upon completion of compulsory quarantine on May 10, they returned to their residence at Tam Kung Temple Road in Shau Kei Wan. They later underwent testing at community testing centre on May 14 according to prevailing requirements and tested positive. For prudence sake, the places where the couple had visited after leaving the hotel will be

included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing tomorrow or the day after.

The couple stayed in room 3204 of the hotel from May 3 to 10. According to the epidemiological investigation of the CHP, during May 7 to 10, a father and son (aged 62 and 27) had stayed in room 3304 of the hotel upon arrival in Hong Kong from Nepal on May 7. They tested positive on May 10 and 11 respectively during their compulsory quarantine at the hotel. According to the whole genome sequencing conducted by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch, the genetic sequences of the couple who had stayed in room 3204 and the 27-year-old man who had stayed in room 3304 are identical, suggesting that they are very likely to be epidemiologically linked.

The CHP has co-ordinated with related government departments and experts to conduct a site inspection to the hotel today to investigate and examine if environmental factors were involved in the infection of the cases. It was preliminarily considered that vertical transmission of virus from a room on a floor to another room on another floor is involved. The CHP's epidemiological investigation is ongoing.

In addition, as of 0.00am, May 20, a total of 9 157 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 9 079 and 75 deaths reported from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively as well as three deaths reported from the Chinese University of Hong Kong Medical Centre. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 9 370 death cases that have 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 (May 19), the total number of confirmed cases was 331 855, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 198 542, 23 and 230 504 respectively.

As the passenger flight (AC007) operated by Air Canada arriving in Hong Kong from Vancouver, Canada, on May 19, had one passenger who failed to comply with the requirements specified under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H), as well as five passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked Cap. 599H to prohibit the landing of passenger flights in Hong Kong from Vancouver operated by Air Canada from May 21 to 25.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that as the local situation of COVID-19 infection is still severe, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with social distancing measures, avoid going out and refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings. This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

â€‹â€‹The spokesman reminded 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 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.

Chief Executive-elect thanks CPG for appointment

Premier Li Keqiang presided at the seventh plenary meeting of the State Council today (May 20), and decided on the appointment of Mr John Lee as the sixth-term Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

Following is the statement by Mr Lee:

"I am most grateful to the Central People's Government (CPG) for appointing me as the sixth-term Chief Executive of the HKSAR. I am deeply honoured by the appointment and fully aware of the great responsibility upon me. I shall shoulder my mission with loyalty and perseverance.

"I pledge to live up to the expectations of the CPG and the people of Hong Kong. I will do my utmost to lead the new-term Government to comprehensively and accurately implement the principle of 'one country, two systems', 'Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong' and a high degree of autonomy in accordance with the Basic Law.

"I shall rise to the challenges ahead at my best, strive to help the needy, unite the society, and build a Hong Kong with vibrancy, hope and opportunities as well as a caring and inclusive culture."