

CHP investigates 53 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, December 23, the CHP was investigating 53 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 8 354 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 8 353 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, six had a travel history during the incubation period.

A total of 1 225 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (December 9 to 22), including 1 140 local cases of which 416 are from unknown sources.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see Annex One or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited the specified venues (Annex Two) under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid test according to the compulsory testing notice. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop.

From tomorrow (December 24) onwards, after the collection of combined nasal and throat swabs of travellers arriving at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) by dedicated staff at the DH's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at HKIA, the COVID-19 nucleic acid test by reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) on the samples will be conducted at a dedicated laboratory set up by a testing agency at HKIA. The RT-PCR test concerned has a shorter turnaround time and the new arrangement is expected to reduce travellers' waiting time for test results.

In view of the latest epidemic developments in the Mainland, the previous arrangement to provide specimen collection containers to inbound travellers arriving via land boundary control points who have been to Shanghai in the past 14 days will be cancelled from tomorrow. These travellers, if they are not exempted persons, are subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days at a designated place (home or other accommodation) upon arrival in Hong Kong. For the arrangement of distributing specimen collection containers to inbound travellers who have been to Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan Province, Heilongjiang Province and Liaoning Province in the past 14 days arriving via land boundary control points, which has come into effect earlier, remains unchanged.

Regarding the severe epidemic situation, the CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The spokesman 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 infections, 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.
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EDB to provide subsidy to kindergartens to support students' learning at home

The Education Bureau (EDB) issued a circular memorandum today (December 23) to all kindergartens (KGs), kindergarten-cum-child care centres and schools with kindergarten classes joining the kindergarten education scheme (collectively referred to as "Scheme-KGs" hereafter), announcing details of two schemes to subsidise KGs to support their students' learning at home. The estimated total funding will be about \$86 million.

The Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, said, "Due to the impact of COVID-19, KGs have to suspend face-to-face classes and adopt diversified modes to help children learn at home, so as to achieve the goal of 'Suspending Classes without Suspending Learning'. We are thankful to all members of the KG sector for their continuous contribution and care on children during this period so as to sustain their learning and support their healthy growth."

"Since it is not desirable for young children to use electronic screen for a long period of time, e-learning is not suitable for KG students. In principle, real-time online teaching is also not supported at KG level. KGs may encourage children to read at home, and design learning activities which suit the abilities and interests of children. KGs may also provide guidelines and learning materials to parents according to their needs, so as to sustain children's learning interest, facilitate them to continue to develop life skills and acquire knowledge, as well as instilling positive values."

Mr Yeung added, "Under the 'new normal' in education, all KGs have been accumulating experiences in conducting home learning activities and it is the time to further promote the relevant culture. The EDB has decided to provide

a one-off subsidy to support KGs to implement two home learning schemes, namely the Gift Book Scheme and Do It Yourself (DIY) Handicraft and Home Learning Package Scheme (Learning Package Scheme). The two schemes aim to cultivate children's reading interest and promote reading culture, as well as encourage creativity of KGs to design interesting home learning activities that meet children's interests, abilities and learning needs."

The EDB will provide a grant through the Gift Book Scheme for KGs to purchase a printed book for each student in each of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school year so as to cultivate their reading interests. The grant of the Gift Book Scheme will be calculated in accordance with the number of eligible students in a school, and the amount allocated will be \$100 per student per school year. No application is required. KGs should use the grant to purchase books for each student and implement different measures to encourage children's reading at home, parent-child reading or book sharing with peers.

Meanwhile, all Scheme-KGs are eligible to apply for the grant of Learning Package Scheme, which is capped at \$50,000 or \$80,000, depending on the size of the KG. KGs are encouraged to design simple, relaxing and interesting learning tasks or parent-child activities and use the grant to prepare materials and guidelines for facilitating students to make DIY handicraft, or produce home-learning packages for students. School sponsoring bodies/operators can also play a coordinating role to assist their KGs to design activities and develop materials collaboratively to leverage the synergy.

The grant for Gift Book Scheme will be disbursed in January 2021 the earliest, while the one-off grant for Learning Package Scheme will be disbursed in March 2021 the earliest.

Mr Yeung hoped that KGs would make good use of the two additional grants to enhance kindergarten education services by strengthening the support on students' learning at home and promoting home-school co-operation as well as parent-child relationship.

New mobile specimen collection station set up at Ping Tin Estate in Lam Tin

The local COVID-19 epidemic situation is worsening rapidly. The confirmed cases are distributed all over the territory. Some of the confirmed cases are asymptomatic and this indicates the existence of many silent transmission chains in the community.

The Government is very concerned about a number of COVID-19 confirmed cases reported recently at Ping Shing House of Ping Tin Estate in Lam Tin.

Starting from today (December 23), the Government has arranged for a testing agency to set up a mobile specimen collection station at the following location to provide free testing service for residents and workers in that district:

New mobile specimen collection station	Operating hours of first day (December 23)
Open area between Ping Wong House and Ping Yan House, Ping Tin Estate (Hong Kong Molecular Pathology Diagnostic Centre Limited)	2pm to 8pm

With effect from tomorrow (December 24), operating hours of the abovementioned mobile specimen collection station is from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 8pm, and it will tentatively operate until December 26 (Saturday). The Government will decide whether it is necessary to extend the operation period of the station after reviewing its usage and public's demand for the testing service.

Separately, after reviewing the usage and public's demand for the testing service, the Government has decided to extend the service period of the mobile specimen collection station at King Tsui Court in Chai Wan to December 27 (Sunday); and the service periods for those at Heung Sze Wui Street in Tai Po, Sha Tsui Road in Tsuen Wan, Wong Tai Sin Square, Tung Chung North Park and Wong Chuk Hang Recreation Ground to December 31 (Thursday). The opening dates and operating hours of the mobile specimen collection stations in various districts providing free COVID-19 nucleic acid testing services for the general public are at Annex.

A Government spokesman said, "The testing agencies will provide specimen collection services by combined nasal and throat swabs at the mobile specimen collection stations for testing free of charge. Persons who are subject to compulsory testing and undergo testing at the mobile specimen collection stations will be deemed to have undergone a test at a Community Testing Centre. The mobile specimen collection stations will accord priority to provide testing service for local residents and workers who are subject to compulsory testing."

People whose test results are negative will be informed by SMS through their mobile phones. If any specimen tested shows a preliminarily positive result, the specimen will be referred to the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Department of Health (DH) for a confirmatory test. Confirmed cases will be followed up and announced by the Centre for Health Protection of the DH.

The spokesman urged all individuals who are in doubt about their own health condition, or individuals with exposure to infection risk (such as

individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases) to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons.

Security guard employed by Housing Department contractor at Lai Yiu Estate tests positive for COVID-19

The Housing Department last night (December 22) learned that a security guard employed by one of its contractors has tested positive for COVID-19. She is now in hospital for treatment.

The security guard normally works on the night shift and is responsible for manning the ground floor guard counter of Wah Yiu House and the Security Control Room. She last performed duties on December 21, and was notified by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) on the same day that she had tested positive for COVID-19.

The security guard has no recent travel history. She has been wearing a face mask and observing relevant disease prevention measures at work. When performing duties, she has been undergoing temperature checks and her body temperature was normal.

The security guard is not a resident of Lai Yiu Estate.

The common areas of Wah Yiu House and the estate management office of Lai Yiu Estate have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the guidelines of the CHP.

The Housing Department will continue to keep up close liaison with the CHP and co-operate with its quarantine work.

Cleaning worker employed by Housing Department contractor at Kwai Shing

East Estate tests positive for COVID-19

The Housing Department (HD) today (December 23) learned that a cleaning worker employed by one of its contractors has tested positive for COVID-19. She is now in hospital for treatment.

After a security guard of Kwai Shing East Estate tested positive for COVID-19 earlier, the HD arranged for all security guards, cleaning workers and estate management office (EMO) staff of the estate to take the test and the cleaning worker tested positive.

The cleaning worker is responsible for refuse collection at Shing Ka House. She last performed duties on December 18. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) notified her today that she had tested positive for COVID-19.

The cleaning worker has no recent travel history. She has been wearing a face mask and observing relevant disease prevention measures at work. When performing duties, she has been undergoing temperature checks and her body temperature was normal.

The cleaning worker is also a tenant residing at Shing Ka House of the estate.

Thorough cleaning and disinfection of the common areas of Shing Ka House and the EMO of Kwai Shing East Estate has been completed in accordance with the guidelines of the CHP.

The HD will continue to keep up close liaison with the CHP and co-operate with its quarantine work.