

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 0.00am today (August 15), a total of 1 783 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 are currently hospitalised for treatment, including 230 new patients. Among the patients staying in isolation facilities, 516 patients are in isolation wards, 90 patients are in second-tier isolation wards and 551 patients are in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, of which 184 in total are new patients. There are two newly reported critical patients and six newly reported serious patients. There are a total of 29 patients in critical condition and 29 are in serious condition, of which nine critical patients are receiving intensive care. Moreover, there are 132 patients who have recovered, including 104 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 58 353 patients who have recovered so far, including 58 059 patients who have been discharged. And since early 2020, there are 70 733 patients who have recovered, including 70 439 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.

Two illegal workers jailed

Two Bangladeshi illegal workers holding recognisance forms were jailed by Shatin Magistrates' Courts on August 11 and today (August 15).

During an anti-illegal worker operation conducted on November 29 and December 28 last year, Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided Yuen Long and Kwai Chung Districts. Two Bangladeshi males, aged 35 and 39, were arrested while working as food delivery workers. Upon identity checking, they produced for inspection recognisance forms issued by the ImmD, which prohibit them from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that they were non-refoulement claimants.

The two illegal workers were charged at Shatin Magistrates' Courts on August 11 and today with taking employment while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force. After trial, they were each sentenced to 22 months and 14 days' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law by employing illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.

CHP investigates suspected food poisoning case related to wild mushrooms

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (August 15) investigating a suspected case of food poisoning related to the consumption of wild mushrooms, and urged the public not to pick and eat wild mushrooms.

The case involves a female aged 53, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting about 15 minutes after consuming mushrooms at home on August 13. She sought medical attention at the Accident and Emergency Department of Kwong Wah Hospital on the same day and was admitted to the hospital for further management. She has been in a stable condition.

Initial investigations revealed that the patient had consumed wild mushrooms picked from a hillside near Beacon Hill on August 13. The CHP's investigation is ongoing.

"Members of the public should not pick wild mushrooms for consumption as it is difficult to distinguish edible mushroom species from inedible ones," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"Mushroom poisoning is generally acute. Common presentations include gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain appearing shortly after ingestion. Depending on the mushroom species, patients may also have other symptoms such as profuse sweating, hallucinations, coma or other neurological symptoms, as well as liver failure. Death may result in severe cases," he added.

"If mushroom poisoning is suspected, the patient should seek immediate medical attention and bring along any available remnant for identification," the spokesman said.

CHP investigates locally acquired SARS-CoV-2 virus cases with 1 594 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and 3 105 cases by RATs verified

as well as 197 imported cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (August 15) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, August 15, the CHP was investigating 4 699 additional locally acquired cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, comprising 1 594 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (716 confirmed cases, 717 asymptomatic cases and 161 cases with pending status) and 3 105 cases that tested positive by rapid antigen tests (RATs) verified in the past 24 hours.

Separately, 197 additional imported cases were reported, including 165 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (nine confirmed cases, 112 asymptomatic cases and 44 cases with pending status) and 32 cases that tested positive by RATs.

Hong Kong has recorded a total of 846 205 and 575 713 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 "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for more information.

As of yesterday (August 14), among the specimens received by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch for verification testing of local cases, about 7.4 per cent and 17.8 per cent of them (7-day moving average) are related to the sub-lineages BA.2.12.1 and BA.4/BA.5 (including suspected cases) under the Omicron mutant strain respectively.

In addition, as of 0.00am, August 15, a total of 9 356 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 9 276 and 77 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 9 569 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, the total number of confirmed cases was 366 015, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 242 000, 31 and 236 400 respectively.

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.

The spokesman reminded the public 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.

Cluster of Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci cases in Kowloon Hospital

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority.

The spokesperson for Kowloon Hospital made the following announcement today (August 15):

A 75-year-old rehabilitation ward in-patient was confirmed to be carrying Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) on August 5. In accordance with the prevailing infection control guidelines, the hospital commenced contact tracing. Two more male patients (aged 71 and 76) staying in the same ward were confirmed to be VRE carriers but without clinical symptoms. The concerned patients are being treated in isolation in the hospital, and are in stable condition.

The ward concerned has adopted the following enhanced infection control measures:

1. Enhanced hand hygiene and stringent contact precautions;
2. Enhanced attention to contamination-prone procedures; and
3. Enhanced disinfection and cleaning of the ward concerned.

The hospital will continue the enhanced infection control measures and closely monitor the situation of the ward. The cases have been reported to the Hospital Authority Head Office and the Centre for Health Protection for necessary follow up.