

CHP follows up on cases tested preliminarily positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus related to pet shops and announces environmental samples results of relevant pet shops

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 20) said it is following up on two cases tested preliminarily positive for SARS-CoV-2 related to pet shops.

The first case tested preliminarily positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus involves a 30-year-old female living in Shing Him House (Block H), Tin Shing Court, 3 Tin Ching Street, Tin Shui Wai. She visited Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay on January 11 and bought a hamster and had contact with case 13047 (staff of Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay). She was classified as a close contact and was arranged to undergo quarantine at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre on January 18. She tested preliminarily positive on January 19. She received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination (Comirnaty) on May 14 and June 12, 2021 in Hong Kong.

The second case tested preliminarily positive involves a 23-year-old female living in Mei Yue House, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Shek Kip Mei. She visited one of the Little Boss shops at Tung Choi Street, Mong Kok and bought a hamster on January 4. She developed runny nose on January 17 and went to a community testing centre for test on January 19. She tested preliminarily positive subsequently. She received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination (Comirnaty) on July 13 and August 4, 2021 in Hong Kong.

The CHP earlier collected 88 environmental samples from the Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay and its warehouse in Tai Po. To follow-up the related infection situation, the CHP has, as at January 20 evening, collected a total of 604 environmental samples from 31 pet shops and relevant warehouses. Apart from the positive test results of the 18 environmental samples collected at the Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay and its warehouse in Tai Po as announced earlier, the latest laboratory testing results revealed that seven of the samples collected from four additional pet shops (I Love Rabbit at 87-99 Kau Yuk Road, Yuen Long; I Love Rabbit at 25-27 Lee Garden Road, Causeway Bay; Little Boss at 187 Tung Choi Street, Mong Kok; and Little Boss at Kai Wan Building, 142-146 Tung Choi Street, Mong Kok) also tested positive.

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department collected samples from hamsters at the pet shop earlier which tested positive. Based on the results of epidemiological investigation and laboratory findings the CHP possesses at this stage, it could not be ruled out preliminarily that the positive test results of the environmental samples are caused by the pets

infected with the virus.

Also, as a prudent measure, the four newly added pet shops will be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues from January 7 to January 18 need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date. The staff members of the four shops will be arranged to undergo compulsory quarantine at the quarantine centre.

Meanwhile, the Government has made a "restriction-testing declaration" (RTD) tonight for the building where the aforementioned 30-year-old female patient resided (Shing Him House (Block H), Tin Shing Court, 3 Tin Ching Street, Tin Shui Wai) and persons who resided or worked at the building will be subject to increased compulsory testing frequency. The places where the patient had visited during the incubation periods will also be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date.

The CHP strongly reminds relevant residents that they must comply with the RTD operation. Any person who fails to present an SMS notification with a test result or wear a wristband as proof of having undergone testing breaches the compulsory testing notice and may be liable to a fine of \$5,000. The person will also be issued with a compulsory testing order, requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the RTD is an offence and the offender may be liable to a fine of level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

CHP reminds relevant residents to comply with "restriction-testing declaration" operations on two cases tested preliminarily positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 20) reminded members of the public that "restriction-testing declarations" (RTDs) have been made for the residences of two of the cases tested preliminarily positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus the CHP is following up. The CHP strongly reminds relevant residents that they must comply with the RTD operations. Any person who fails to present an SMS notification with a test result or wear a wristband as proof of having undergone testing breaches the compulsory testing notice and may be liable to a fine of \$5,000. The person will also be issued with a compulsory testing order, requiring him/her

to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the RTD is an offence and the offender may be liable to a fine of level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

The first case involves a 37-year-old male living in Tower 1, New Haven, 363 Sha Tsui Road, Tsuen Wan. He works at Unit C, 12/F, Po Yip Building, 23 Hing Yip Street, Kwun Tong, where he last went to work on January 18. He developed cough on January 18 and consulted a private doctor on January 19. The sample collected on the same day tested preliminarily positive. He received three doses of COVID-19 vaccination (Comirnaty) on May 7, May 28, 2021 and January 14, 2022 in Hong Kong.

The second case involves a 24-year-old male living in Cheung Yan House, Cheung Sha Wan Estate, 9 Tonkin Street, Cheung Sha Wan. He works at 1/F, 22 Wo Yi Hop Road, Kwai Chung, where he last went to work on January 17. He developed runny nose and sore throat on January 17 and consulted a private doctor on the same day. His sample collected on January 18 tested preliminarily positive. He received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination (Comirnaty) on June 3 and July 2, 2021 in Hong Kong.

The CHP is now investigating the places where the two patients visited during incubation periods in order to ascertain the infection sources and to terminate the silent transmission chains in the community.

The Government has made RTDs tonight for the buildings where the patients resided (Tower 1, New Haven, 363 Sha Tsui Road, Tsuen Wan and Cheung Yan House, Cheung Sha Wan Estate, 9 Tonkin Street, Cheung Sha Wan) and persons who resided or worked at the buildings will be subject to increased compulsory testing frequency. The places where the patients had visited during the incubation periods will also be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date.

The spokesman for the CHP said, "The Government has remained vigilant and has been closely monitoring the latest scientific data on mutant strains as well as the epidemic situation of various places. The most stringent anti-epidemic measures will be implemented to prevent the mutant strains from spreading in the local community."

At the moment, the adverse impact on the epidemic situation caused by the newly emerged mutant strains is not fully known yet, but vaccination is still essential to prevent severe cases and deaths from COVID-19 infection. The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

EDB announces implementation of "vaccine bubble" in schools

The Education Bureau (EDB) issued a letter to all schools in Hong Kong today (January 20) to inform them of the details of the arrangement of the implementation of "vaccine bubble" covering schools from February 24.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "Starting from February 24, except for those exempted (e.g. those who are unfit for vaccination due to health reasons), all teaching and non-teaching staff, persons providing on-campus services and visitors of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools (including special schools and their boarding sections, and schools offering non-local curriculum), and private schools offering non-formal curriculum (commonly known as 'tutorial schools'), will be required to present vaccination records of at least the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine prior to their entry into school premises.

"In addition, teachers and school staff directly employed by schools who have received only one dose of COVID-19 vaccine should receive the second dose of vaccination during the period within eight weeks after February 24, that is, have received the second dose before April 21."

For those exempted personnel who have not had vaccination, they are still required to conduct COVID-19 tests once every three days. The specimens must be obtained from combined nasal and throat swabs, and not collected through self-testing kits.

Although the "vaccine bubble" arrangement does not apply to students, the EDB urges students in the relevant age groups to get vaccinated as soon as possible to better protect themselves and others, and to have more opportunities to participate in learning and extra-curricular activities.

Schools should clearly record and keep a register of related vaccination records properly and the records of the negative test results of the school staff and other persons concerned.

The spokesman said that schools should inform all related stakeholders (including all school staff, school bus operators, tuck shop operators, parents, nannies and volunteers) of the related details before the implementation of the "vaccine bubble" arrangement, and strongly urge unvaccinated staff to receive vaccination as soon as possible.

He stressed that starting from February 24, under no circumstances should any unvaccinated staff (apart from those exempted) employed by the schools be allowed to perform teaching or other duties online or off-campus during the periods when face-to-face classes are not suspended. The school management has the responsibility to take action in respect of staff disciplinary matters in accordance with the provisions of the Employment Ordinance and the Codes of Aid.

The spokesman added that the Government is introducing enhancements to the "LeaveHomeSafe" and the QR Code Verification Scanner applications to facilitate premises to ascertain the vaccination status of visitors. Schools should promptly set up QR codes for "LeaveHomeSafe" (www.leavehomesafe.gov.hk/en/registration) to facilitate all teaching and non-teaching staff, persons providing on-campus services and all other visitors (apart from those exempted) to use the mobile application each time they enter school premises by February 24 and thereafter. Students entering school premises can be exempted.

The spokesman reiterated that vaccination is a crucial part of the local anti-epidemic strategy, and urged all school staff and visitors to get vaccinated as soon as possible to construct a more effective protective barrier for both schools and the community.

The school letter has been uploaded onto the EDB website (www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/diseases-prevention/edb_20220120_eng_a.pdf).

CE's Office condemns intimidation

A pet shop worker has earlier been confirmed to be infected with COVID-19, and the samples collected from the hamsters at the pet shop and environmental swabs collected from its warehouse in Tai Po have been tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. The animals concerned have been humanely dispatched by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to minimise as soon as possible the potential risks of virus transmission in Hong Kong. The HKSAR Government strongly condemns the sending of intimidating messages as received by some members of the Government's anti-epidemic expert advisory group after their explanation of the situation to the public.

A spokesman for the Chief Executive's Office today (January 20) said that the decision and operation of the HKSAR Government were based on scientific principles and Hong Kong's actual circumstances to safeguard public safety. Hong Kong is now facing a challenging epidemic situation, with the imminent threat of both the Delta and Omicron mutant strains spreading in the community. It is of paramount importance to take decisive action to prevent the virus from further spreading in the community. The Government strongly condemns the irrational attitude adopted towards the anti-epidemic efforts, and worse still, intimidating remarks made against the experts, by a minority of people. It calls on all sectors of society to unite to fight the epidemic.

"Hong Kong is a society that observes the rule of law. It will not tolerate such illegal acts as violence and intimidation. Over the past two

years, members of the Government's anti-epidemic expert advisory group have been providing the Government with professional advice in such areas as public health, epidemiology and clinical experience with science and theories as the basis amid the fight against the virus. The HKSAR Government is much grateful for their contributions. If anyone attempts to influence the words and efforts of the experts by illegal means, the HKSAR Government will not tolerate such acts and will take stringent follow-up action," the spokesman said.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (January 20), 19 patients who had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus (case numbers: 12556, 12594, 12625, 12629, 12687, 12689, 12694, 12699, 12700, 12805, 12809, 12836, 12870, 12871, 12894, 12935, 12936, 12983 and 13032) were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 12 493 patients have been discharged.

A total of 340 patients who had tested positive are currently hospitalised in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, the Hospital Authority (HA) Infectious Disease Centre, the Community Treatment Facility at AsiaWorld-Expo and a public hospital. All of them are in stable condition.

The HA 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.