

CHP reminds relevant residents to comply with “restriction-testing declaration” operations on four cases tested preliminarily positive and one case tested indeterminate for SARS-CoV-2 virus

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 17) reminded members of the public that "restriction-testing declaration" (RTD) have been made for the residences of four of the cases tested preliminarily positive and one case tested indeterminate 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 four cases tested preliminarily positive involve a family who resides in Po Wah Court, 450-464 Un Chau Street, Cheung Sha Wan. The cases involved a 29-year-old male (asymptomatic; worked as a takeaway food courier in Sham Shui Po District and last went to work in early January); a 31-year-old female (asymptomatic); a nine-year-old boy (asymptomatic; studied in Li Cheng Uk Government Primary School and last went to school on January 14); and a one-year-old girl (developed symptoms on January 16). All four persons have no recent travel history. During the contact tracing of the earlier case 13045, it was revealed that case 13045 stayed at the same room with a member of this family (who tested negative) at Silka Seaview Hotel Hong Kong for quarantine after arrival in Hong Kong from abroad and met with the above four members of this family on January 10, the CHP thus sent all the five members of this family to quarantine centre on January 15 and four of them tested preliminarily positive today.

The Government has made an RTD tonight for the building where the patients resided (Po Wah Court, 450-464 Un Chau Street, Cheung Sha Wan). The places where the patients had visited during the incubation period 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.

Separately, the case tested indeterminate involves a 23-year-old female

living in Kui Wo House, Tai Wo Estate, Tai Po. She is asymptomatic and her sample collected at a mobile specimen collection station on January 16 tested indeterminate. The CHP has sent her to a public hospital where her sample will be collected to confirm if she is not an infection case. The Government assessed that risk of infection in the relevant area cannot be ruled out at this stage and decided to make an RTD tonight for the building where she resided (Kui Wo House, Tai Wo Estate, Tai Po).

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).

HAD to distribute 300 000 complimentary COVID-19 rapid test kits

The Home Affairs Department (HAD) announced today (January 17) the distribution of 300 000 complimentary COVID-19 rapid test kits to residents in need across all 18 Districts in the coming few weeks.

In view of the suspected existence of silent transmission chains in the community, the Government appeals to persons with infection risks to undergo voluntary testing as soon as possible. The District Offices will distribute COVID-19 rapid test kits to residents in need (including elderly people, foreign domestic helpers and individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, etc.) and urge them to take the test by themselves, for effective and early identification of whether they have been infected, so as to better protect infected persons and their families. For details of distribution, please contact the respective District Offices.

The HAD spokesperson stressed that rapid test kit testing is not a substitute for the Government's compulsory testing requirement. Persons subject to testing in accordance with a compulsory testing notice must go to any of the mobile specimen collection stations, community testing centres or recognised local medical testing institutions to undergo professional swab sampling in fulfilling the relevant requirements. In addition, those who feel unwell (even if the symptoms are very mild) should seek medical advice

promptly and get tested under the instructions of a healthcare worker.

The Government appeals for the co-operation of members of the public to safeguard the health of themselves and their families by undergoing testing on a voluntary basis and fight the virus together.

Further support by Anti-epidemic Fund to tourism industry

The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau said today (January 17) that the Government has earmarked a provision of around \$570 million under the Anti-epidemic Fund for providing the sixth round of support to the tourism industry, which includes one-off cash subsidies to the travel trade and its practitioners and funding injection to extend the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme (GLIS).

Taking into account the latest round of support, the various targeted support provided by the Government to the tourism industry amounts to a cumulative commitment of around \$3.42 billion in total in the past two years.

All persons who are eligible for and have been granted special further subsidies in the last round of the Tourism Industry Additional Support Scheme are not required to submit fresh application for cash subsidies. The Tourism Commission (TC) has informed the aforesaid eligible persons of the arrangement for cash subsidy disbursement by SMS notifications today. The subsidies will be disbursed before the Chinese New Year.

The new round of one-off cash subsidies involves around \$270 million with details as follows:

(1) travel agents: travel agents with 10 or less staff members will be provided with a subsidy at a flat rate of \$50,000 each; for travel agents with 11 staff members or more, the subsidy level will be directly proportional to the number of staff members they have, with a subsidy level of \$5,000 per staff member as the basis of calculation. Some 1 580 travel agents are expected to benefit from this measure;

(2) travel agents' staff and freelance accredited tourist guides and tour escorts whose main occupation is/was tourist guide and tour escort: each will be provided with a one-off subsidy of \$7,500. Some 18 300 persons are expected to benefit from this measure; and

(3) drivers of tour service coaches who are/were mainly serving tourists: a one-off subsidy of \$3,350 will be provided to each tour service coach driver. Some 3 400 drivers are expected to benefit from this measure.

The arrangement for cash subsidy disbursement will be uploaded to the TC's website (www.tourism.gov.hk).

Besides, the Government will inject \$300 million to extend the GLIS so as to encourage the trade to continue to explore more local tour itineraries with special characteristics during the time when cross-border/boundary travel has yet to be resumed, thereby creating more tourism-related job opportunities for practitioners like travel agents, tourist guides, tour escorts, and drivers of tour service coaches, while assisting to enhance the standards of attractions and their supporting facilities, as well as the services of tourist guides and other aspects, so as to equip them well for the return of visitors.

The GLIS, which involves \$100 million, was launched in January 2020. The scheme provides a cash incentive of \$200 per participant based on the number of tour participants, and the number of participants which each travel agent can claim for incentive payment is capped at 1 000. The incentive scheme was originally scheduled to run until the end of March 2022.

Details of the scheme will be announced on the website of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (www.tichk.org).

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (January 17), 23 patients who had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus (case numbers: 12533, 12561, 12565, 12571, 12592, 12613, 12616, 12630, 12647, 12649, 12664, 12691, 12716, 12717, 12719, 12724, 12794, 12801, 12820, 12844, 12847, 12864 and 13022) were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 12 416 patients have been discharged.

A total of 376 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 and the Community Treatment Facility at AsiaWorld-Expo. 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.

CHP investigates three confirmed and four asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 40 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 17) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 17, the CHP was investigating three additional confirmed cases and four additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were seven additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 867 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 178 asymptomatic cases and three re-positive cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 048 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of three imported cases, three cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, and one local case. Six of the cases involve mutant strains, while the viral load of the remaining case is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise four males and three females, aged 11 to 46. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The three cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases are 13051 (17-year-old male), 13052 (11-year-old girl) and 13053 (46-year-old female). They are the household contacts of case 13014. The local case is case 13047 (23-year-old female living in 2-4 Tung Sing Road, Aberdeen, who works in Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay).

A total of 348 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 3 to 16). Sixty-three of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, two are local cases, and the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 12952 to 12960, 12962, 12964, 12965, 12967 to 12970, 12972 to 12989, 13008, 13009, 13013, 13015, 13017 and 13019 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 453 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

Also, as a passenger flight (TK083) operated by Turkish Airlines arriving in Hong Kong from Istanbul, Turkey, on January 15 had three passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit the landing of passenger flights from Istanbul operated by Turkish Airlines in Hong Kong from January 17 to 30.

According to the testing and quarantine arrangements for cases with mutant strains, persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on specified dates in accordance with the announcement by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day (see the details of the buildings and dates of testing at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf).

The CHP strongly reminded members of the public to strictly follow the compulsory testing requirements and undergo the multiple tests on time as required. The compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well. The Government will seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notices. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months. Relevant officers of different government departments are empowered to perform certain functions under the relevant Regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), including requesting individuals to provide information and assistance when necessary. Any person who fails to comply with the relevant request commits an offence and would be liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). The Government reiterates that the aim of issuing a compulsory testing notice is to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the community as soon as possible to protect overall public health and safety.

With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to comply with the recently tightened social distancing measures in the next two weeks, and to refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings (particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed, "The global situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility, and there are also reports of breakthrough infections in some vaccinated individuals. The CHP strongly urges members of the public to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong, in particular to specified places with high risk under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary

Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H)."