

CHP announces positive case with vaccine strain contamination

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 8) said that according to the test result of the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) for confirmation of a case tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus, it indicates that the sample was possibly contaminated by vaccine strain. As the sample was taken by a private doctor, the CHP visited the relevant clinic with an expert to understand the situation. Initial result revealed that the positive test results of the sample were not caused by infection. Hence, the relevant case will not be classified as SARS-CoV-2 virus infection.

The case involves a 53-year-old female patient living in Block B, The Crescent, 13 Ho Man Tin Hill Road, Ho Man Tin with no recent travel history. She received three doses of COVID-19 vaccination (CoronaVac) in Hong Kong. She attended a banquet at Reserva Ibérica Tapas Bar & Restaurant, Shop 10, 1/F, Causeway Centre, 28 Harbour Road, Wan Chai in the evening on January 3. She is asymptomatic. Her family member who is a private doctor took a sample from her on January 6 with a testing kit which was stored at the doctor's clinic. The clinic offers COVID-19 vaccination (CoronaVac) for the public.

The sample tested preliminary positive by a private laboratory with a Ct value of 35/36. Testing by the PHLSB confirmed that the sample does not carry the N501Y, L452R, E484K or T478K mutant strains but carried the D614D strain which is compatible with the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine strain. The two test results for the virus after admission to the hospital were negative and she did not have any conditions that could be caused by a real infection.

In relation to the above testing results, the CHP conducted a site inspection to the doctor's clinic mentioned above with an expert from the University of Hong Kong. It is learned that the doctor performed COVID-19 vaccine injection for 13 clients on January 6, and there is a possibility that the environment was contaminated with the vaccine.

After examining the clinical, epidemiological and laboratory findings, the CHP considered that the case is compatible with vaccine strain contamination and hence will not be classified as a case of SARS-CoV-2 virus infection. Quarantine order of her close contacts will be lifted.

Government makes “restriction-testing

declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Tung Chung

The Government today (January 8) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 7pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Tung Chung (i.e. Shun Yat House, Yat Tung (II) Estate, 8 Yat Tung Road, Tung Chung. See Annex) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about 7am tomorrow (January 9).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As a preliminary tested positive case who has lived in the abovementioned building was detected today, and the preliminary test result involved a mutant strain, the risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area after the test result was found to be positive."

The Government has set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 1am tomorrow. Arrangements have been made for persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around 7am tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

Persons in the "restricted area" who have undergone testing from January 6 to January 8, 2022, and are able to provide the SMS notification through a mobile phone or related certification containing the test results, are not required to take the test again. However, they are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. Also, according to the compulsory testing notice to be issued today, any person who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from December 19, 2021 to January 8, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before January 10, 2022. As a mutant strain is involved, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons are also required to undergo testing.

In addition, in accordance with the latest arrangement, persons who resided in the same building as the preliminary tested positive case carrying variants of concern suspected to be Omicron are required to undergo compulsory testing on days 2, 3, 4, 7, 12 and 19 counting from the day subsequent to that when the relevant confirmed case last stayed in that building before being admitted to hospital for treatment or leaving Hong Kong.

The Housing Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 3152 3952) which has started operation at 7pm today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory 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 compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Government appeals to foreign domestic helpers to fight the virus together

The Government is highly concerned about the latest epidemic situation and strongly appeals to all sectors today (January 8) including foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) to fight the virus together. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) conducts joint operations with several Government departments this weekend again at popular places in different districts where FDHs commonly gathered, and appeals to them to maintain awareness of epidemic prevention, keep the environment clean and hygienic, and comply with the various anti-epidemic regulations and restrictions, including the requirements on group gatherings and wearing of masks.

The FEHD, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Police Force, the Labour Department, the Immigration Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, conduct joint operations today and tomorrow at the public places near popular FDH gathering places during weekends and public holidays, such as Tamar Park and Chater Road in Central, Victoria Park and Sugar Street in Wan Chai and the pedestrian footbridge at Mong Kok Road. During the operations, apart from arranging cleansing contractors to strengthen the street cleaning services at the relevant spots, the FEHD also steps up patrols to combat littering and unlicensed hawking activities. In addition, promotional leaflets in multiple-language are also distributed by the FEHD to appeal to FDHs to maintain environmental hygiene and refrain from conducting unlicensed hawking activities. FDHs are also reminded by other government departments to comply with the regulations on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places.

The spokesman said, "The Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) provides that a person who participates in a prohibited group gathering of more than four persons in public places or fails to wear a mask in accordance with the requirement respectively may be charged a fixed penalty of \$5,000."

To minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission, the spokesman strongly appeals to all to stay vigilant and comply with the relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease in a concerted and persistent manner. The spokesman also reminds members of the public to exercise self-discipline and co-operate to fight the virus together.



Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (January 8), eight patients who had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours (case numbers: 12437, 12453, 12474, 12476, 12482, 12498, 12506 and 12510). So far, a total of 12 243 patients have been discharged.

A total of 373 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 and 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 21 confirmed and 16 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 17 additional Omicron cases from

previously announced cases and updates isolation arrangement for discharged patients

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 8) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 8, the CHP was investigating 21 additional confirmed cases and 16 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 37 additional cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). This brings a total number of confirmed cases to 12 770 so far and starting from January 1 recorded 132 asymptomatic cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 12 902 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

In view of the latest development of epidemic situation and demand for quarantine, isolation and treatment facilities, after risk assessment by the Government, with effect from January 8, patients tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus who fulfilled discharge criteria will undergo the 14-day compulsory home isolation and health monitoring in designated places (home or other accommodation).

The newly reported cases consist of 30 imported cases, six cases epidemiologically linked with imported case, and one local case. 29 of the cases involved mutant strains, mutation test results of six cases are pending, while the viral load of the remaining two cases is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise 18 males and 19 females, aged 1 to 74. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The six cases epidemiologically linked with imported case are 12874 (62-year-old female who had a meal together with case 12611 and 12637 at Moon Palace on December 27, 2021), 12879 (4-year-old girl, a family member of case 12767), 12880 (74-year-old male, a co-worker of case 12825), 12882 (32-year-old female, had contact with case 12838 on January 2), 12883 (39-year-old female, a foreign domestic helper, attended the same church at Sea View Estate in North Point as case 12805), and 12903 (44-year-old female, a foreign domestic helper living in Block 6, On Ning Garden, Tsung Kwan O, attended the same church at Sea View Estate in North Point as case 12805). The local case 12872 involves a 58-year-old female and details of the case have been announced yesterday (January 7) (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/07/P2022010700835.htm).

A total of 309 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (December 25, 2021, to January 7, 2022). Twenty-four of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, while the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced

earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 12732, 12753, 12756 to 12766, 12821, 12822, 12825 and 12841 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 240 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

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 that 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 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 gathering (particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

â€‹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)."