

## Working Group on air change or air purifiers in catering premises holds another meeting in view of latest epidemic developments

The Secretary for Food and Health stipulated in March last year a requirement on air change or air purifiers to be complied with in dine-in catering premises in the directions in relation to the catering business under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). The Working Group established for the smooth implementation of the requirement held another online meeting Thursday evening (January 6) in view of suspected clusters of infection at restaurants in recent days. The Chairman of the Working Group, expert members and representatives from government departments discussed the latest epidemic developments and offered views on anti-epidemic strategies.

Since the online meeting on January 4, the Working Group noted that additional confirmed cases have visited a number of restaurants during their respective incubation or infectious period. At the online meeting on January 6, apart from getting an update of the confirmed or preliminary positive cases of the previous restaurant, the Working Group also examined the initial observations obtained from site visits of two restaurants, including information on the implementation of air change and air purifiers at the restaurants concerned, as well as the seating distribution of the confirmed or preliminary positive cases and the duration of their stay etc. known at the time of the meeting.

The Omicron variant is the mutant variant with the most mutations since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and may carry higher transmissibility. It is also spreading globally at an unprecedented blistering pace. The number of confirmed cases of Omicron has been increasing rapidly around the world as well as becoming the mainstream mutant strain in some countries and places. It has rung a very worrying alarm bell.

The Chairman of the Working Group, Professor Yuen Pak-leung said, "As pointed out by the Working Group in its final report, the Working Group acknowledged that a basket of anti-epidemic and social distancing measures (such as mask-wearing, distance and partition between tables, the cap on capacity of premises and number of persons per table, relevant requirements on vaccination or virus testing by staff, and relevant requirements on vaccination by customers) implemented in dine-in catering premises since March 2020 have contributed towards putting the pandemic under control. Among them, measures on augmentation of fresh air supply or provision of air purifiers would help reduce the risk of virus transmission. Air change per hour (ACH) at six is an effective engineering control means, but the literature also points out that the relative risk reduction is not 100 per cent."

"Increasing ACH, either in lieu of or as augmentation to, the existing provision of fresh air at catering premises is a practical means taken worldwide. Catering premises operator must also pay attention to placement of air purifiers in accordance with on-the-ground situation and the manufacturer manual, with a view to optimising the intended effect. Air purifiers should be installed in a position that could effectively cover the areas occupied by users. Apart from sufficient outside air supply at catering premises, there must also be even distribution of air (air balancing) with reference to the circumstances of the premises; and also air mixing through air movement so as to achieve dilution and cleansing effect. All these could mitigate the stagnant air problem in dead corners," Professor Yuen continued.

The Working Group would also like to alert operators of catering premises through the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department that at all times when their premises are in operation, apart from complying with the ventilation requirement pursuant to the directions made under Cap. 599F, they must at the same time comply with the requirement under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) that the licensed premises must be provided with a ventilating system that will provide for each person accommodated in the premises an amount of outside air not less than 17 cubic metres per hour per person. The Working Group points out that catering premises operators must, at all times when their premises are open for business, always switch on and properly operate its ventilating system; and must remind their catering staff of the necessity of such arrangements, in order to ensure the fulfilment of the above-mentioned requirement on outside air supply.

The Working Group will continue to keep in view the epidemic development and assess whether there is a need to recommend adjustments. The Working Group appealed again to the catering sector, other sectors and members of the public to continue to comply with the relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease in a concerted and persistent manner to protect personal and public health. In addition, as vaccination is a very crucial part of the local anti-epidemic strategy, the Working Group also encouraged the public to proactively respond to the appeal to receive vaccination as early as possible.

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## **CE's statement on the incident involving officials' attendance at banquet**

Regarding the incident involving the attendance of a number of officials at a banquet in the evening on January 3, the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, after giving an account of the incident to public at a media session

yesterday (January 6) evening, made the following statement today (January 7) having regard to the latest development of the relevant case as reported by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP):

I learnt from the CHP today (January 7) afternoon that the banquet may involve another preliminary positive case and that the person tested preliminarily positive took part in the banquet from 6pm to 8pm. If the case is confirmed eventually, all participants of the banquet will be classified as close contacts and are required to be sent to the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre for quarantine. In other words, the eight officials, who were not required to be subject to quarantine given the attendance at the banquet after 9.30pm in relation to the first confirmed case, will be classified as close contacts who need to be subject to quarantine.

Having regard to the latest development and the report by several more officials who had attended the banquet, in addition to the three officials who attended the banquet after 9.30pm and were sent to the quarantine centre (the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui; the Director of Immigration, Mr Au Ka-wang; and the Political Assistant to the Secretary for Development, Mr Allen Fung), 10 more officials will be arranged to be sent to the quarantine centre, while pending confirmation by the CHP in due course on the status of the new infection case.

I have instructed all officials being subject to quarantine that they should not continue to discharge their duties and that they are required to take their own vacation leave for quarantine. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has made appropriate arrangements to ensure that the daily operation would not be affected, including the arrangement for the Deputy Commissioner / Head of Operations of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), Mr Ricky Yau, to be the Acting Commissioner of the ICAC; the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Management), Mr Kwok Yam-shu, to be the Acting Commissioner of Police; the Deputy Director of Immigration, Mr Benson Kwok, to be the Acting Director of Immigration. Taking into consideration that both the Directors of Bureau and the Under Secretaries of the Home Affairs Bureau and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau need to undergo quarantine, the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, will take up the post of the Secretary for Home Affairs concurrently; and the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, will take up the post of the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury concurrently. All the above-mentioned posting arrangements will last until the completion of the quarantine of the relevant officials.

As to whether the attendance of 13 officials at the banquet constitutes any breach of discipline, I have instructed the Director of the Chief Executive's Office, Mr Chan Kwok-ki, and Mr Nip to make detailed investigations. Mr Chan will handle the investigation of 10 Politically Appointed Officials and the ICAC Commissioner, Mr Simon Peh, while Mr Nip will handle the investigation of two heads of department who are civil servants. The investigation will cover the detailed circumstances of the attendance of each official at the banquet, including the time of arrival, duration of stay and their behaviours there. The investigation and enforcement action by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)

under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), covering such aspects as whether the attendee used the LeaveHomeSafe app and wore a mask, will also be taken as reference.

As regards enforcement actions against the restaurant and customers, I have requested the FEHD to investigate according to the law as soon as possible and inform the public of the investigation results timely.

I have to reiterate that concerted efforts of the whole society is needed to fight the virus and that Government officials should lead by example, abide by the rules, stay vigilant and refrain from taking part in high-risk activities. After the completion of the above-mentioned investigations, I will take appropriate actions against the relevant officials.

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## **Government sets up large-scale mobile specimen collection stations in Victoria Park to meet testing demand**

The Government today (January 7) reminded the public that, as multiple premises on the Hong Kong island have been included in compulsory testing notices, two large-scale mobile specimen collection stations have been set up in Victoria Park to provide free testing services to persons who reside at or have visited high-risk places.

The two stations are located at (1) the bandstand in Victoria Park (near Causeway Bay MTR station and exits to Gloucester Road) and (2) the handball court in Victoria Park (near Tin Hau MTR station and exit to Hing Fat Street). The service hours start from 10am till 8pm.

Apart from the large-scale mobile specimen collection stations in Victoria Park, some other specimen collection stations have also been set up at places such as Lockhart Road Playground in Wan Chai, Causeway Bay Community Centre near Fortress Hill MTR station, and North Point Community Hall. An additional mobile specimen collection station will be set up in Tamar Park at Admiralty tomorrow (January 8).

A spokesman of the Food and Health Bureau said that the Government set up about 30 additional mobile specimen collection stations for residential buildings and premises under compulsory testing notices in various districts within a short period of time. Extra manpower was also arranged to serve the public. Citizens who need to undergo virus testing may make good use of community testing centres (CTCs) which allow advance booking to make

appointments for testing so as to save waiting time.

"The Government will continue to monitor closely the utilisation rate of testing services and make every effort to ensure a sufficient testing capacity to meet the demand. We will set up more mobile specimen collection stations in areas with testing demand based on risk assessment to enable citizens to undergo testing and fight the virus together," the spokesman said.

During the period of December 25, 2021 and January 6 this year, testing service was provided to over 640 000 persons in total at the CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations, including more than 40 000 citizens who took free tests after receiving exposure notifications through the LeaveHomeSafe mobile application. On January 6, over 75 000 samples were collected at the CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations in one day.

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## **Statement by Commissioner of Police**

The following statement is issued by the Commissioner of Police, Mr Siu Chak-yeo today (January 7):

I briefly stayed at a birthday gathering in Wan Chai at around 6pm on January 3. In view of the situation where participants of the gathering had been tested or tested preliminarily positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus involving mutant strains, I will proceed on leave and fully cooperate with the arrangement made by the Centre for Health Protection by undergoing quarantine at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre. During my leave, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Management), Mr Kwok Yam-shu, will be the Acting Commissioner of Police.

I hereby apologise for the additional burden caused by the incident on the territory-wide anti-epidemic work.

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## **FEHD investigates suspected contravention of anti-epidemic regulations in Wan Chai restaurant**

A spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)

says today (January 7) that the FEHD is conducting a full investigation into a banquet held earlier at a restaurant in Wan Chai.

Confirmed cases and preliminary positive cases of COVID-19 were detected subsequent to the banquet held at a restaurant in Wan Chai on January 3. A large number of attendees have to be quarantined, and their activities at the banquet have been widely reported. As preliminary information suggests that there might have been violations of anti-epidemic regulations at the banquet, the Centre for Health Protection has referred the case and relevant information to the FEHD for follow-up. The FEHD has immediately launched a full investigation.

The investigation, which covers the operator and staff members of the restaurant, as well as attendees of the banquet, aims to ascertain if anyone has breached the regulations, especially the directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), such as requirements regarding scanning of the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code, wearing of masks, etc.

The restaurant concerned holds a provisional general restaurant licence and is registered for Type D Mode of Operation.

In view of the epidemic situation, the FEHD has issued letters to operators of catering premises multiple times to remind them to strictly comply with the various anti-epidemic regulations and restrictions. The spokesman strongly appealed to these premises operators to remain vigilant, while members of the public also have to comply with the related regulations and directions on group gatherings and mask wearing at catering premises. The FEHD will step up inspection and enforcement, and take stringent enforcement action against persons acting in defiance of the legislation.