

FEHD strengthens regulations on handling of meat and poultry by fresh provision shops

With a view to ensuring food safety and enhancing environmental hygiene, a spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) said today (December 31) that the FEHD will introduce a new licensing condition in fresh provision shops (FPS) licences to strengthen the regulations on their handling of meat and poultry.

The spokesman said, "The new licensing condition stipulates that unless prior written approval for an alternative arrangement has been obtained from the FEHD, all fresh/chilled/frozen meat or poultry to be delivered to the licensed FPS for sale, no matter whether the meat or poultry is prepackaged, must be directly delivered into the premises, and at no time be left or kept outside the premises (including any street, pavement, alley, passageway, and space) pending further handling or sale. In addition, in any circumstances under the alternative arrangement, the meat or poultry must at all times be properly kept in a clean and hygienic condition and be so protected to prevent from the invasion or contamination by any kind of animals (including mammals, birds and insects) or the ambient environment pending collection or during delivery into the premises."

"Under the new arrangement, the FEHD will impose the above licensing condition in newly issued FPS licences starting January next year. If the applicants consider it necessary, they are required to apply to FEHD for prior approval for alternative arrangement when they apply for the licences."

For existing FPSs with valid licences, the FEHD has met with various trade representatives recently to explain the operation details of the new licensing condition and gauge their views, and will also issue letters to serve as a notice to existing licensees of all FPSs. The above licensing condition will be added to the renewed licences, and a notification period of at least 90 days are given before the new condition comes into effect. Applications for alternative arrangement shall be made at least one month before the expiry of the existing licences. The FEHD appealed to licensees of all FPSs to make preparation and follow up as early as possible.

"When considering the approval of alternative arrangement for newly issued licences or renewed licences, the FEHD will take into account if the FPSs have practical difficulties that render direct delivery of meat or poultry into the premises impossible. If licensed FPSs are found in breach of the abovementioned licensing condition, the FEHD will consider cancelling their licences," the spokesman added.

The spokesman said that the FEHD will evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative after implementation, and will step up inspections and enforcement actions as necessary to ensure that FPSs comply with the relevant licensing

condition as well as various regulations stipulated under the Food Business Regulation (Cap. 132X) and other relevant laws. He appealed to all FPS practitioners and the trade to work together with the Government to safeguard food safety and protect public health.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (December 31), 10 COVID-19 confirmed patients (case numbers: 12411, 12413, 12443, 12447, 12473, 12512, 12517, 12564, 12614 and 12633) were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. All of the patients have completed the 14-day post-discharge isolation. So far, a total of 12 206 patients with confirmed or probable infection have been discharged.

A total of 176 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre and the Hospital Authority (HA) Infectious Disease Centre. Among those patients, one is in serious condition (case number: 12548) while the remainder 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 19 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 and six additional Omicron cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, December 31, the CHP was investigating 19 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 12 650 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 12 649 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases consist of 17 imported cases and two import-related cases. All of the cases involve mutant strains. The patients comprise 10 males and nine females, aged 13 to 76. Among the imported cases,

nine of them arrived in Hong Kong from Group A specified places (high-risk) with enhanced surveillance, and eight from Group A specified places (high-risk). Five patients tested positive during the "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival at the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) at Hong Kong International Airport, and 12 tested positive during quarantine, among which, case 12649 is an aircrew member who is a co-worker of an earlier confirmed imported case, 12610. Also, cases 12637 and 12654 are epidemiologically linked with an earlier confirmed imported case, 12611. The CHP had announced the case details of cases 12637, 12649 and 12654 last night (December 30) (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202112/30/P2021123000898.htm).

Among the above-mentioned imported cases, three of them had stayed in Hong Kong during the incubation periods. Case 12639 involves a 15-year-old female patient, living at 56 Repulse Bay Road, Block 2, Repulse Bay. She departed Hong Kong on December 12 for the United States (US) and returned to Hong Kong on December 28 from the US by private jet. Her specimen collected upon arrival in the TSCC tested negative. According to the quarantine requirement for inbound travellers from a Group A specified place (high-risk) with enhanced surveillance, she underwent quarantine at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre for the first four days, during which her sample on December 29 tested positive. She developed a sore throat on the same day and her sample carried the N501Y and T478K mutant strains.

Case 12641 involves a 13-year-old male patient living at Tower 1, Kwun Lung Lau, 20 Lung Wah Street, Kennedy Town. He departed Hong Kong on December 16 for the United Kingdom (UK) after he tested negative on December 15. He arrived in Hong Kong on December 25 from the UK by flight CX252 and his specimen collected upon arrival in the TSCC tested negative. According to the quarantine requirement for inbound travellers from a Group A specified place (high-risk) with enhanced surveillance, he underwent quarantine for four days at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre. He later moved to a designated quarantine hotel to continue quarantine, during which his sample on December 29 tested positive and carried the N501Y and T478K mutant strains. The patient was asymptomatic.

Case 12648 involves a 16-year-old male patient living at Block 2, Coastal Skyline, Tung Chung. He is a family member of an earlier confirmed imported case, 12624. He departed Hong Kong on December 16 for the US after he tested negative on December 16. He arrived in Hong Kong on December 28 from the US by flight CX881 with case 12624 and his specimen collected upon arrival in the TSCC tested negative. As case 12624 tested positive, he was thus sent to the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre for quarantine as a close contact. His sample during quarantine on December 29 tested positive. He was asymptomatic and carried the N501Y and T478K mutant strains. He studies in the English School Foundation West Island School.

Furthermore, the CHP was notified by the Taiwan health authority on December 29 of a case confirmed in Taiwan involving a 65-year-old female patient who lives at Wharney Hotel, 57-73 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai. She travelled to Taiwan on December 14 by flight CX494 after she tested negative on December 12 in Hong Kong. Her sample taken in Taiwan on December 27 tested

positive. The patient was asymptomatic. She received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination (AstraZeneca) in Taiwan on July 27 and October 19.

The places where the above four patients resided and visited in Hong Kong during the incubation periods have been included in a compulsory testing notice (CTN). Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date.

A total of 124 cases have been reported in the past 14 days (December 17 to 30). One of them is an import-related case, while the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch confirmed that cases 12601, 12602, 12603, 12604, 12605 and 12612 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. These cases involve three males and three females, aged 19 to 42 years old. Three of them tested positive during the "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival at the TSCC and the other three tested positive during quarantine.

Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 87 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

As CHP has recorded increasing number of asymptomatic and re-positive cases, with effect from January 1, 2022, CHP will further differentiate the cases which were tested positive into three categories: confirmed, asymptomatic and re-positive in the daily press release and at the CHP website.

Also, as the passenger flight (CX873) operated by Cathay Pacific arriving in Hong Kong from San Francisco, the US, on December 30 had three passengers who tested positive upon arrival, and the passenger flight (PR300) operated by Philippine Airlines arriving in Hong Kong from Manila, the Philippines, on December 30 had six 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 in Hong Kong from San Francisco operated by Cathay Pacific and from Manila operated by Philippine Airlines from December 31 to January 13, 2022.

According to the testing and quarantine arrangements for local COVID-19 cases with mutant strains, the CHP reminded that 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).

Specified persons in relation to the following specified premises are also reminded to undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the CTN tomorrow (January 1):

- Wing Chak House, Chak On Estate, Chak On Road, Shek Kip Mei
- Block A, Hoi Tao Building, 11 Belcher's Street, Kennedy Town

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

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)."

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Tin Shui Wai

The Government today (December 31) 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 Tin Shui Wai (i.e. Block 2, Grandeur Terrace, No. 88 Tin Shui Road, Tin Shui Wai, New Territories, Hong Kong. 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 1, 2022).

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 positive case who has lived in the abovementioned building detected today may involve 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 December 29 to December 31, 2021, 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 17 to December 31 2021, 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 2, 2022. As mutant strain may be 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 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: 3190 5130) which will

start 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.

CHP investigates COVID-19 preliminary positive case involving mutant strain at Block 2, Grandeur Terrace in Tin Shui Wai

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 31) said that it is investigating a preliminary positive import-related case of COVID-19 involving a mutant strain.

The case involves a 30-year-old female patient living at Block 2, Grandeur Terrace, Tin Shui Wai. She is an airport ground crew staff member working at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). The patient received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination on July 25 and August 26 (CoronaVac) in Hong Kong. According to her job nature, she has to undergo frequent regular COVID-19 testing and she tested negative in 10 tests during November 24 to December 28. She developed cough on December 28 and her specimen collected on December 30 in the mobile specimen collection station at Tin Shui Sports Centre in Tin Shui Wai tested preliminarily positive with a Ct value about 29 to 33 involving N501Y and T478K mutant strains.

A preliminary investigation revealed that she mainly worked at the Orange Zone of HKIA to receive outbound and transit passengers, and she has likely acquired the infection during work. The patient has no recent travel history and she last went to work on December 29.

As the patient may carry the Omicron mutant strain, the Government has made a "restriction-testing declaration" tonight for the building where the

patient resided in Hong Kong (Block 2, Grandeur Terrace, Tin Shui Wai) and persons who resided or worked at the building will be subject to increased compulsory testing frequency. The places where she had visited and worked in Hong Kong 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. An epidemiological investigation and contact tracing of the case will continue. Noting the above case, the CHP has immediately conducted a field inspection at HKIA today together with officers from the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and collected 31 environmental samples from the workplace of the patient, and the storeroom, changing room and restroom the patient had used. The test results are pending.

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 strain 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).