

CHP investigates two COVID-19 preliminary positive imported cases involving local aircrew

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 27) said that it is investigating two preliminary positive imported cases of COVID-19 involving local aircrew. The first case involves a 45-year-old male patient living at One South Lane, No.1 South Lane, Shek Tong Tsui. He tested negative in Hong Kong on December 17 and left Hong Kong on December 21 for the United States by flight CX844 and returned to Hong Kong on December 23 by flight CX841 from the US. His specimen collected upon arrival in the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at Hong Kong International Airport tested negative for COVID-19.

The patient underwent medical surveillance and regular compulsory testing in accordance with the relevant requirements for exempted persons. According to the patient, except from buying food in the community for a short duration of time and going to a Community Testing Centre to collect sample for testing, he stayed at home during the rest of the time. His sample collected at a Community Testing Centre yesterday (December 26) tested preliminary positive for COVID-19. He developed symptoms including headache, runny nose and cough on the same day. His Ct value was about 16 to 22 and test results on mutant strains are pending.

The patient received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination (Comirnaty) on May 3 and May 24 as well as a dose of COVID-19 vaccination (CoronaVac) on December 13 in Hong Kong. The patient has stayed in Hong Kong during most of the incubation period, as a prudent measure, the Government made a "restriction-testing declaration" tonight for the building where the patient resided in Hong Kong (One South Lane, No.1 South Lane, Shek Tong Tsui). The places where he had visited 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. Epidemiological investigation and contact tracing of the case will continue.

The second case involves a 46-year-old male patient living at Peninsula Village Twilight Court, Discovery Bay. He tested negative in Hong Kong on December 19, 20 and 22. He left Hong Kong on December 23 by flight CX840 for the United States and returned to Hong Kong on December 25 by flight CX843 from the US. His specimen collected upon arrival in the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at Hong Kong International Airport tested negative for COVID-19. His sample collected at a Community Testing Centre today tested preliminary positive for COVID-19. He is asymptomatic with a Ct value of about 31 to 33. The test results on mutant strains are pending. He received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination (Comirnaty) on June 11 and July 2 in Hong Kong.

Epidemiological investigation and contact tracing of the case will continue. As a prudent measure, the places where he had visited in Hong Kong during the incubation period will 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 strain from entering 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).

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Shek Tong Tsui

â€‹The Government today (December 27) 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 10.30pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Shek Tong Tsui (i.e. One South Lane, No.1 South Lane, Shek Tong Tsui. 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 (December 28).

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 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 will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 2am tomorrow. Arrangements will be 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 25 to December 27, 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 5 to December 27, 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 December 29, 2021. 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 confirmed local case carrying variants of concern are required to undergo compulsory testing on the 3rd day, 7th day, 12th day and 19th day 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 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.

Mobile specimen collection stations continue to provide COVID-19 testing service to public

The Government will set up a mobile specimen collection station outside Tower 18, Hong Kong Parkview, 88 Tai Tam Reservoir Road tomorrow (December 28) to provide free testing service for residents and workers subject to compulsory testing.

Furthermore, the address of a specified premises included in the compulsory testing notice announced earlier today (December 27) should be Smartone Mobile Communications Limited, Room 901 to 923, 9/F, Kowloonbay International Trade & Exhibition Centre, 1 Trademart Drive, Kowloon Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Any person who had been present at that premises for more than one hour at any time during the period from December 8 to December 26, 2021 (including but not limited to full-time, part-time and relief staff and visitors), has to undergo testing by December 28, 2021. If persons subject to compulsory testing have previously undergone testing between December 24 and December 26, 2021, they would be taken to have complied with the requirements set out in the compulsory testing notice.

If Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above, the Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or the post-super typhoon "extreme conditions" announcement by the Government is in force at any time during the period for undergoing the compulsory testing, the period for undergoing the compulsory testing will be extended for one day. Outdoor mobile specimen collection stations will be closed if the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or the Red Rainstorm Warning Signal is in force while all mobile specimen collection stations together with all community testing centres (CTCs) will be closed when the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or higher or the Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is in force.

CTCs provide testing services for the public, including free service for persons subject to compulsory testing. Booking and walk-in services are available. Members of the public only need to provide simple personal information on the 24-hour booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en). The system shows the booking status of the centres for the coming two weeks to facilitate the public's planning and selection of a suitable testing centre and a time slot for testing. The testing centres will accord priority to serve individuals with advance bookings. As of 6pm today, there were around 31 000 booking places available for tomorrow at the CTCs, and around 93 per cent availability for booking places for the coming seven days. Members of the public may call the testing centres for enquiries on the availability of bookings or walk-in quotas before visiting the centres.

Free testing service will be provided to persons subject to compulsory testing at CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations located at 33 places in various districts tomorrow. The testing capacity should be sufficient to meet the demand. Persons subject to compulsory testing and those with the "LeaveHomeSafe" COVID-19 exposure notification or SMS notification from the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) reminding them to undergo testing as soon as possible may receive free testing at CTCs or mobile specimen collection stations (if the service scope is applicable). The opening dates and operating hours of the mobile specimen collection stations are stated in Annex.

People whose test results are negative will be informed by SMS message through their mobile phones. Persons subject to compulsory testing must keep the relevant records properly. If any specimen tested shows a preliminarily positive COVID-19 result, the specimen will be referred to the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Department of Health for a confirmatory test. Confirmed cases will be followed up and announced by the CHP.

The Government reminds the public that they can undergo COVID-19 testing through various means. For details, please refer to www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html. If a person has symptoms, he or she should seek medical attention immediately and should not attend the mobile specimen collection stations or CTCs.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau urges all individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, or individuals with infection risks (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or had contact with confirmed cases), to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons.

Government tightens boarding and

quarantine requirements for places with Omicron cases detected

The Government announced today (December 27) that in view of the latest global developments of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Dominican Republic, Kosovo and Malta will be specified as Group A specified places from 0.00am on December 30 to tighten the boarding and quarantine requirements for relevant inbound travellers.

As a preventive measure and with reference to the relevant risks, the Government will specify overseas places that have detected Omicron cases as Group A specified places. Noting that the detection of Omicron cases was confirmed in the Dominican Republic, Kosovo and Malta, the Government will specify them as Group A specified places from 0.00am on December 30. Non-Hong Kong residents who have stayed there within 21 days will not be allowed to enter Hong Kong. Hong Kong residents can only board a flight for Hong Kong if they have been fully vaccinated and hold a recognised vaccination record. They will have to undergo compulsory quarantine in a designated quarantine hotel for 21 days upon returning to Hong Kong, with six tests to be conducted during quarantine, followed by compulsory testing in a community testing centre on the 26th day of arrival in Hong Kong.

Details on the relevant boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements for respective specified places can be found at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/inbound-travel.html.

The Government will gazette the relevant updated specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to effect the above measures.

Transcript of remarks on COVID-19 pandemic situation by SFH at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, at a media session after visiting public hospitals, today (December 27):

Reporter: Do you expect Hong Kong to see the fifth wave of infection and how bad will it be? Also, is there any contingency plan in case of any Omicron

community outbreak?

The Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, before Christmas, I chaired a meeting together with the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority, and of course the Food and Health Bureau, to discuss and prepare for our response plan in case Omicron has an outbreak in Hong Kong. We have discussed the prevention and response plan in particular our capacity – testing capacity, our quarantine facilities, our isolation facilities, as well as what if Omicron really has an outbreak in Hong Kong, whether we need to tighten our social distancing measures, and so on. Of course, vaccination is the most important. Taking COVID-19 vaccine is an effective measure to protect ourselves, especially the elderly in Hong Kong who has a relatively low vaccination rate. Vaccination can protect them from Omicron and also from the outbreak. So this is number one.

We are doing the assessment constantly in terms of the global situation and also putting places with Omicron cases – all different countries and places – into our Group A specified places. This already is a tightened measure. That means those who are not Hong Kong residents and those who are unvaccinated would not be able to come to Hong Kong if they are from Group A countries/places.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)