

CHP investigates COVID-19 preliminary positive case involving mutant strain at On Hei House, Siu Hei Court in Tuen Mun

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 23) said that it is investigating a preliminary positive imported-related case of COVID-19 involving a mutant strain.

The case involves a 64-year-old male patient living at On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun. He is a toilet cleaner working at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). The patient received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination on July 10 and August 10 (CoronaVac) in Hong Kong. According to his job nature, he has to undergo frequent regular COVID-19 testing and he tested negative in 10 tests during December 2 to 20. His specimen collected yesterday (December 22) in the mobile specimen collection station at HKIA tested preliminarily positive with a Ct value about 27 to 32. He developed symptoms on the same day. Testing by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch revealed that the spike protein gene of the patient's sample involves N501Y and T478K mutations (negative for the L452R and E484K strains), hence the CHP suspects at this stage that the patient carries the Omicron variant, but a whole genome sequencing still needs to be conducted to confirm whether the patient carries the Omicron variant.

A preliminary investigation revealed that he has no recent travel history and he mainly performed cleaning and disinfection work at a designated toilet solely for use by preliminary positive imported cases confined at a designated area at the Midfield Concourse of HKIA while waiting for transfer to hospital. He last went to work on December 22. He had stayed inside the storeroom situated inside the toilet during work and had been in the toilet with preliminary positive cases at the same time. The CHP has conducted a site visit at HKIA today and collected 26 environmental samples at the storeroom, a changing room and a restroom used by the patient with the test results pending.

A preliminary investigation showed that the patient has likely acquired the infection during his work at the toilet for preliminary positive cases. In view of the relatively high Ct value and multiple negative tests in the past 21 days, the case was likely detected at a very early stage of infection by regular testing.

The CHP has advised the Airport Authority Hong Kong and the contractor concerned that the cleaners should only perform cleaning and disinfection work after the preliminary positive cases have left the toilet after use, and the cleaners should not stay inside the storeroom in toilet when they are not performing work.

As the patient carries a mutant strain with higher transmissibility and risk of infection, the Government has made a "restriction-testing declaration" tonight for the building where the patient resided in Hong Kong (On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun) and persons who resided or worked at the building will be subject to increased compulsory testing frequency. 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. An epidemiological investigation and contact tracing of the case will continue.

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).

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Tuen Mun

The Government today (December 23) 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 7.30pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Tuen Mun (i.e. On Hei House (Block A), Siu Hei Court, 201 Wu Chui Road, Tuen Mun. 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 24).

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 1.30am 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 21 to 23, 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 1 to 23, 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 25, 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 Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2835 1473) which starts operation at 7.30pm 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.

[Mainland fishing vessel suspected of operating illegally in Hong Kong waters intercepted in joint operation \(with photo\)](#)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (December 23) laid a charge against a Mainland fisherman on board a Mainland fishing vessel suspected of engaging in illegal fishing in Hong Kong waters north of Wong Mau Chau.

AFCD and the Marine Police officers mounted a joint anti-illegal fishing operation in the above-mentioned waters last night (December 22), a Mainland fishing vessel suspected to be carrying out illegal fishing by cage traps was intercepted for investigation at about 8.30pm. Some fishing gear was seized on board.

A charge was laid against the Mainland fisherman, who was suspected to have violated the Fisheries Protection Ordinance (Cap. 171) (the Ordinance). The case will be mentioned at Fanling Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (December 24).

Only vessels registered under the Ordinance can be used for fishing in Hong Kong waters. Regardless of the type of fishing gear used, a non-local fishing vessel is not allowed to carry out fishing activities in Hong Kong waters. Any offender upon conviction is liable to a maximum penalty of a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for six months.

An AFCD spokesman said, "The Government is committed to cracking down on illegal fishing activities in Hong Kong waters. The AFCD will maintain close co-operation with relevant law enforcement departments and step up patrols and stringently enforce the law."



[Steady increase in Hong Kong's gross expenditure on research and development in "Hong Kong Innovation Activities Statistics 2020"](#)

According to the report "Hong Kong Innovation Activities Statistics 2020" released today (December 23) by the Census and Statistics Department, the gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) of Hong Kong in 2020 amounted to \$26,554 million, representing an increase of around 25 per cent compared with the corresponding figure in 2017, having increased from \$26,333 million in 2019 despite the epidemic in 2020. The GERD as a ratio to the Gross Domestic Product increased to 0.99 per cent in 2020.

A government spokesman said, "Innovation and technology (I&T) is a key policy area of the current-term Government. We have unprecedentedly invested over \$130 billion in developing infrastructure, promoting research and development, nurturing talent, and supporting the industry, and more, thereby striving to enhance the I&T ecosystem in Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong was affected by the pandemic in 2020, different sectors have been proactively embracing the challenges, continuing to leverage our strength in technology to enhance their competitiveness and business performance."

The spokesman also said that, with the support from the Central Government for Hong Kong to develop into an international I&T hub as mentioned in the National 14th Five-Year Plan, which also included the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Loop as a major platform of co-operation in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Government would give full play to Hong Kong's strengths and develop I&T with brand new mindset. A series of initiatives were announced in the 2021 Policy Address, including developing areas around Lok Ma Chau/San Tin synergistically with the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park to form the San Tin Technopole, and set up an InnoLife Healthtech Hub.

"The Government strives to enhance the I&T ecosystem. The Steering Committee on Innovation and Technology, established and chaired by the Chief Executive, regularly monitors progress including the implementation of the relevant measures under the Government's eight major areas to develop I&T. These measures are expected to continue to bear fruits gradually," the spokesman added.

[FEHD raids unlicensed cold store in Yuen Long \(with photo\)](#)

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (December 23) raided an unlicensed cold store at Tai Shu Ha Road West, Yuen Long.

During the operation, the FEHD arrested one person and initiated procedures on prosecution for operating an unlicensed cold store, and found about 9 900 kilograms of chilled poultry with official health certificates on the premises. In addition, about 139kg of chilled poultry offal without official health certificates were seized for disposal.

Under the Food Business Regulation, the maximum penalty for operating an unlicensed cold store is a fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment upon conviction.

"We will continue our stringent enforcement action against unlicensed food business to safeguard food safety and public health," an FEHD spokesman said.

Members of the public can report any suspected illegal food business activities by calling the FEHD hotline at 2868 0000.

